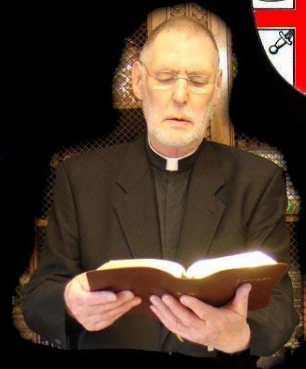


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**Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet
and a light unto my path.
Psalm 119: 105**



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Evangelical House Churches

Berea Bible Handbook – Part Five

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon (or Canticles)

Research and study by Rev. Philippe L. De Coster, B.Th., D.D.

OLD TESTAMENT	History										Poetry				
	Genesis	Exodus	Leviticus	Numbers	Deuteronomy	Joshua	Judges	Ruth	1 Samuel	2 Samuel	1 Kings	2 Kings	1 Chronicles	2 Chronicles	Job
															Psalms
															Proverbs
															Ecclesiastes
															Songs of Solomon
NEW TESTAMENT	Laws of Moses										Prophecy				
	ISAIAH	JEREMIAH	LAMENTATIONS	EZEKIEL	DANIEL	HOSEA	JOEL	AMOS	OBADIAH	JONAH	MICAH	NAHUM	HABAKKUK	ZEPHANIAH	HAGGAI
															ZECHARIAH
															MALACHI
NEW TESTAMENT	Major Prophets					Minor Prophets					Biography				
	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN	ACTS	ROMANS	1 CORINTHIANS	2 CORINTHIANS	GALATIANS	EPHESIANS	PHILIPPIANS	COLOSSIANS	1 THESSALONIANS	2 THESSALONIANS	1 TIMOTHY
															2 TIMOTHY
															TITUS
															PHILEMON
NEW TESTAMENT	(The Gospels)					Other Letters					Prophecy				
	Hebrews	James	1 Peter	2 Peter	1 John	2 John	3 John	Jude	REVELATION						

Introduction

Poetry is the natural vehicle of thought when the emotions are stirred, and among the Hebrews it goes back to the earliest days (Genesis 4:23, 24; 9: 25-27). So we find a song for the digging of a well (Numbers 21:17), songs of victory (Numbers 21:27; Judges 5.), and laments over loss (2 Samuel 1:17). The Psalms are “*par excellence*” the religious poetry of Israel, but Job, Proverbs, Canticles and Lamentations are also, in the main, poetical in form.

Hebrew poetry knows no rhyme, but is distinguished from prose by rhythm and metrical arrangement, by its special vocabulary and style, and by a characteristic feature known as “parallelism”, which may be of three kinds.

1. **Synonymous**, where the second half of a verse repeats the content of the first, or nearly so, in different words. (Numbers 23:8; Psalm 37:2,6,10, 12).
2. **Antithetic**, where a contrast, or antithesis, is set out in the second clause (Psalm 37:9).
3. **Synthetic**, where the second part develops the thoughts in the first, either as a consequence or as an expansion (Psalms 2:6; 37: 4, 5, 13; Proverbs 16: 3,5).

We sometimes find just three main words making up a sense of one line, so giving a peculiar terseness of expression. Moreover, many parts of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Minor Prophets are also written in poetry. And we shall see that the most important poetic effects in biblical poetry can be appreciated even in an English translation.

Translating poetry is notoriously difficult. Many translations of Homer’s epic poems, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, for example, are in prose rather than poetry. Rhythm, rhyme, repetitive sounds and wordplays are not easily reproduced in a translation. However, the key to appreciating biblical poetry, and indeed most of the ancient Near Eastern poetry, is none of these. It is parallelism.

A typical verse of Hebrew poetry is divided into two or more complementary parts or members — and these members parallel each other in some way. In the books of Job, Psalms and Proverbs, the scribes often inserted gaps to separate the different members of each verse. Most English versions of the Bible retain the parallelism of the Hebrew text.

Look at Proverbs 6:20-21¹:

¹ King James Version (1611)

My son, keep thy father's commandment,
and forsake not the law of thy mother:
Bind them continually upon thine heart,
and tie them about thy neck.

Both verses divide into two members, with the second member repeating the thought of the first in different words. The next verse is divided into three parallel members:

When you walk, they will guide you;
when you sleep, they will watch over you;
when you awake, they will speak to you"
(Proverbs 6:22).

Notice that in the above examples, it is not only the *thoughts* that are parallel but also the grammatical structures, especially in verse 22. Furthermore, the terms in one member have corresponding terms in the other member: "keep" and "do not forsake," "father's commands" and "mother's teaching," "bind" and "fasten" etc. Parallelism is not simply repetition. The Hebrews used a wide variety of techniques to enable the final member of the verse to complete, intensify or give additional meaning to the earlier members. Biblical scholars have compiled extensive analysis of the grammatical, phonological, lexical and semantic changes used in moving from one line to the next. We will briefly look at some of the more common types.

In staircase parallelism, the second member repeats verbatim the beginning of the first member:

Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD
glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto
his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.
(Psalm 29:1-2).

This form, also called climactic parallelism, is used to build a series of climaxes in Psalms 29 and 94, for example. Antithetical parallelism is often marked in English translations by the word *but* dividing the members:

A false balance is abomination to the LORD:
but a just weight is his delight.
(Proverbs 11:1).

These sort of contrasts are particularly frequent in Proverbs 10–15, but throughout the Psalms also:

For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous:
but the way of the ungodly shall perish.
(Psalm 1:6).

In emblematic parallelism, one of the members is a simile or metaphor:

"As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, O God"
(Psalm 42:1)

And

As the lily among thorns,
so is my love among the daughters.
(Song of Songs 2:2).

A chiastic parallelism, a form of envelope structure, inverts the word order in the second line:

Length of days is in her right hand;
and in her left hand riches and honour.
(Proverbs 3:16)

and

The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed
me.
(Psalm 18:20).

External parallelism is where an entire verse is parallel to the next verse, or perhaps the first verse is parallel to the third verse and the second verse is parallel to the fourth verse:

Lift up your head, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting
doors; and the King of glory shall come in.
Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the

LORD mighty in battle.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory.

(Psalm 24:7-10).

Understanding even the basics about parallelism gives us a greater appreciation of the poetic sections of the Bible. If you want to study this subject further, you may wish to read James L. Kugel's *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*, which is a detailed examination of parallelism, and Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, which has chapters discussing how parallelism is used to enhance the messages in the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs and the prophetic books.

Hebrew Parallelism from the Tanakh (Jewish Old Testament)

As Hebrew poetry is written much differently than our own Western style of poetry, many do not recognize the poetry which can cause problems when translating or interpreting these passages.

Approximately seventy-five percent of the Tenach (Old Testament) is poetry. All of Psalms and Proverbs are Hebrew poetry. Even the book of Genesis is full of Poetry. There are several reasons the Hebrews used poetry, much of the Torah was sung and was easier to sing too, poetry and songs are easier to memorize than straight texts, Parallel poetry (as in Genesis 1) emphasizes something of great importance, as the creation story is. The rabbis believed that if something is worth saying, it is worth saying beautifully." There is much more poetry in the Bible than most realize because most people do not understand it.

Parallelism is most commonly found in the book of Psalms and Proverbs but is found throughout the whole of the Hebrew Bible. Parallelism is the expression of one idea in two or more different ways.

**"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path".
(Psalms 119:105)**

The above example of a simple parallel and can be written in this manner;

Your word is:

- 1. a lamp to my feet**
- 2. a light for my path**

Here we see that the words "lamp" and "light" are paralleled as well as the words "my feet" and "my path". Below is another example of this style of poetry.

"My son, my teachings you shall not forget and my commands your heart shall guard." (Proverbs 3:1)

In this verse the words "my teachings" is paralleled with "my commands" and "you shall not forget" is paralleled with "your heart shall guard" and can be written as follows.

My son:
1. My teachings you shall not forget
2. My commands your heart shall guard

Below is Psalm 15:1-3 broken down into its poetic sequences. In this example each thought is represented by the letters A, B, C and D. Each expression of a thought is represented by the numbers 1 and 2.

A1. Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary?
A2. Who may live on your holy hill?

B1. He whose walk is blameless
B2. and who does what is righteous.

C1. who speaks the truth from his heart
C2. and has no slander on his tongue.

D1. who does his neighbor no wrong
D2. and casts no slur on his fellow man.

Here are some other examples of parallelisms from the Bible.

Matthew 19:30
A. But many that are *first*
B. shall be *last*;
B¹. and the *last*;
A¹. Shall be *first*.

Isaiah 6:10

A. Make the *heart* of this people fat,

B. and make their *ears* heavy,

C. and shut their *eyes*;

C¹. lest they see with their *eyes*,

B¹. and hear with their *ears*,

A¹. and understand with their *heart*, and return, and be healed."

Another common form of parallelism is the use of negatives where two opposing ideas are stated as we see in Proverbs 11:19-20.

A¹. Righteousness brings one to life

B¹. Pursuit of evil brings one to his death

B². a twisted heart is an abomination of YHWH

A². a mature path is his pleasure

The Poetry of Genesis

When we read Genesis chapter one we usually see only one story there, but there are actually many stories. Why don't we see these multiple stories? Because we read the Hebrew Bible from a Modern Western thinkers point of view and not from an Ancient Eastern thinkers such as the Hebrews who wrote it. The Hebrews style of writing is prolific with a style of poetry unfamiliar to most readers of the Bible. This poetry is nothing like the poetry we are used to reading today and therefore it is invisible to us.

The most common form of Hebrew poetry is called parallelism. Parallelism is when the writer says one thing in two or more different ways. The Psalms and Proverbs are filled with these such as the examples below.

Psalms 119:105 - "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." The first part of this verse is paralleled with the second part. This verse is not saying two different things, rather, one thing in two different ways.

Proverbs 3:1 - "My son, do not forget my teaching, and keep my commands in your heart." Again the first part is paralleled with the second part.

Genesis 4:23 - Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me and a young man for injuring me."

Let's break down what Lamech says; [Adah and Zillah, listen to me] = [wives of Lamech, hear my words] then he says; I have killed [a man for wounding me] =

[a young man for injuring me]. Lamech did not wound one and injure another, but killed one person and says it two different ways.

Often we overlook what the Bible is telling us because we are not recognizing what the poetry of a passage is attempting to convey. For example look at Psalms 40:8; "I desire to do your will, O my God; your Torah is within my heart" Here we see that doing the will of God is the same thing as having the Torah within your heart.

Now let us look at the Creation story Parallels of Genesis chapter one.

Creation Story Number 1

The first story is found in Genesis 1.1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The Hebrew word "bara" is a verb and is usually translated as "create". To really understand what this word means let us look at another passage where this word is used.

1 Samuel 2.29 - Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honour your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?' The word "fattening" in the passage above is the Hebrew word "bara". The noun form of this verb is "beriya" and can be found in Genesis 41.4 - "And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows." The word "fat" is the Hebrew word "beriya".

The word "bara" does not mean, "create" (Hebrew actually has no word that means "create" in the sense of something out of nothing) but "to fatten". If we take the literal definition of "bara" in Genesis 1.1 we have - In the beginning God fattened the heavens and the earth. What does this fattening of the heavens and earth mean? This verse is not showing the creation of the heaven and earth, but rather the fattening or filling up of it. Therefore, Genesis 1.1 is a condensed version of the whole creation story.

Creation Story Number 2

The second creation story paralleling Genesis 1.1 is Genesis 1.2 - "and the earth was unfilled and empty and darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Wind of God was hovering over the waters." In this passage we see that the earth was formless and empty before it was filled up, then the Wind of God hovers over the waters of the earth. This hovering would be the action of the Wind of god filling up the earth.

The use of the word "and" at the beginning of this verse may cause some confusion due to an understanding of how this word is used in Hebrew. In English the word "and" in between verses one and two means that what happens in verse two occurs after what happens in verse one. In Hebrew, the word "and" is used in standard Hebrew poetry to link two statements as one. In other words, verse one is the same thing as verse two.

Creation Story Number 3

The third story is found in Genesis 1.3-5. "And God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light and God saw that the light was good and he separated the light from the darkness and God called the light 'day', and the darkness he called 'night' and there was evening, and there was morning, the first day".

Hebrew, like English, has a word for one and a different word for first. The same is true for the words two and second, three and third, etc. As an example the Hebrew word for "three" is "shelosh", and the Hebrew word for "third" is "sheliyshi". Days 2 - 7 use the Hebrew word for second, third, fourth, etc. We would assume that the "first" day would use the Hebrew word "reshon" meaning "first" in order to be consistent with the other six days, but instead we have the word "echad" meaning "one" or "in unity". The author is making a parallel with the "first" day and with all the days of creation. I believe this is because all seven days of the fattening of the earth are being united in this verse. The first day of creation is also a parallel with the whole of creation as the earth was in darkness and the act of filling the earth brought light to the earth.

Creation Story Number 4

The fourth creation story is found in Genesis 1.3-13. In these passages we have the first three days of creation. These are the days of separating. On the first day God separated light and darkness. On the second day God separated the waters above from the waters below forming the sky and the seas. On the third day God separated the land from the water forming dry land.

Creation Story Number 5

The fifth creation story is found in Genesis 1.14-31. In these passages we have the second set of three days of creation. On the fourth day God filled the light with the sun and the darkness with the moon and stars. On the fifth day God filled the sky with the birds and the sea with the fish. On the sixth day God filled the dry land with the animals and man. Notice the correlation between the first set of three days of separation with the second set of three days of filling.

Creation Story Number 6

The sixth story is the whole of Genesis chapter one. Though we have looked at five different stories of creation, they are all combined together to form one complete story of creation.

Epilogue

It must be remembered that modern western thinkers view events in step logic. This is the idea that each event comes after the previous forming a series of events in a linear timeline. But, the Hebrews did not think in step logic but in block logic. This is the grouping together of similar ideas together and not in chronological order. Most people read Genesis chapter one from a step logic perspective or chronological, rather than from the block logic so prevalent in Hebrew poetry.

Poetical Translation of Genesis Chapter One along the Tanakh

Filling the Void

¹In the beginning the Mighty One filled the skies and the land ²because the world existed devoid and void. A chaotic void was over the face of the deep then the creative breath of the Mighty One hovered over the face of the water.

The Making of Light (Order out of Chaos)

³The Mighty One said "let order exist" and order came into existence. ⁴The Mighty One saw that the order was beautiful. The Mighty One made a separation between the order and the chaos. ⁵The Mighty One called the order day and the chaos night. There was an evening and there was a morning, a unified day.

The Making of the Waters and the Skies

⁶The Mighty One said "there will be a sheet between the water to separate the waters". ⁷Then the Mighty One placed the sheet separating the waters under the sheet from the waters over the sheet and it was established. ⁸The Mighty One called the sheet, skies. There was an evening and there was a morning, a second day.

The Making of the Land

⁹The Mighty One said "the waters under the skies will gather toward one place" and dry ground appeared and it was established. ¹⁰and the Mighty One called the

dry ground, land and the collection waters he called, seas. The Mighty One saw that it was beautiful. ¹¹The Mighty One said "the land will sprout grass sprouts and seed fruit seeds, each to its own kind whose seed is in them all over the land" and it was established. ¹²The land brought out grass sprouts and sowing seeds each to its own kind and fruit trees whose seeds are in them, each to their own kind. The Mighty One saw that it was beautiful. ¹³There was an evening and there was a morning, a third day.

The Filling of the Light

¹⁴The Mighty One said "bodies of light will exist in the sheet of the skies to separate between the day and the night and they will exist for signs and appointments, for days and years. ¹⁵They will exist for lights in the sheet of the skies to give light over the land, and it was established". ¹⁶The Mighty One made the two large bodies of light. The large body of light to rule the day and the small body of light luminary to rule the night and the stars. ¹⁷and the Mighty One placed them in the sheet of the skies to give light over the land ¹⁸ to rule the day and the night and to separate the order and the chaos. The Mighty One saw that it was beautiful. ¹⁹There was an evening and there was a morning, a fourth day.

The Filling of the Water and Skies

²⁰The Mighty One said "the waters will swarm with living swarms and flyers will fly over the land and over the face of the sheet of the skies". ²¹The Mighty One filled the great monsters and all the living things, the crawling ones that swarm in the waters, each to their own kind and all the flyers with wings each to their own kind. The Mighty One saw that it was beautiful. ²²The Mighty One knelt before at them to say "they will yield and increase and fill the waters in the seas and the flyers will increase on the land. ²³There was an evening and there was a morning, a fifth day.

The Filling of the Land

²⁴and the Mighty One said "the land bring forth the living souls, each to her own kind, creatures and crawlers and the living ones of the land; each to her own kind, and it was established. ²⁵The Mighty One made the living ones of the land, each to their own kind and the creatures, to their own kind and all the crawlers of the ground to their own kind. The Mighty One saw that it was beautiful. ²⁶The Mighty One said "we will make man in our shadow, like our shape and they will subdue the fish of the sea and he flyers of the skies and the creatures and all the land and all the crawlers crawling over the land. ²⁷The Mighty One filled the man with his shadow; in the shadow of the Mighty One he filled him, male and female he filled them. ²⁸and the Mighty One knelt before them and the Mighty

One said to them "they will yield and increase and fill the land and subjugate it and they will subdue the fish of the sea and the flyers of the skies and all the lives of the crawlers over the land" ²⁹The Mighty One said "look, I give you all the grass sowing seeds that is over the face of the whole land and all the trees which have fruit sowing seeds, these exist are for you as food. ³⁰All the living ones of the land and the flyers of the skies and the crawling ones over the land which have a living soul in them have all the green grass for food and it was established. ³¹The Mighty One saw that all he had made and behold, it is very beautiful. There was an evening and there was a morning, a sixth day.

What is the Tanakh?

The **Tanakh** (Hebrew: תנ"ך, pronounced [ta'naχ] or [tə'naχ]; also *Tenakh*, *Tenak*, *Tanach*) is a name used in Judaism for the canon of the Hebrew Bible. The Tanakh is also known as the Masoretic Text or the *Miqra*. The name is an acronym formed from the initial Hebrew letters of the Masoretic Text's three traditional subdivisions: The Torah ("Teaching", also known as the Five Books of Moses), *Nevi'im* ("Prophets") and *Ketuvim* ("Writings")—hence *TaNaKh*. The name "*Miqra*" (מִקְרָא), meaning "that which is read", is an alternative Hebrew term for the Tanakh. The books of the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) were relayed with an accompanying oral tradition passed on by each generation, called the Oral Torah.

History

According to the Talmud,^[1] much of the contents of the Tanakh were compiled by the "Men of the Great Assembly" by 450 BCE, and have since remained unchanged. Modern scholars believe that the process of canonization of the Tanakh became finalized between 200 BCE and 200 CE.

The Hebrew text was originally an abjad: consonants written with some applied vowel letters ("*matres lectionis*"). During the early Middle Ages scholars known as the Masoretes created a single formalized system of vocalization. This was chiefly done by Aaron ben Moses ben Asher, in the Tiberias school, based on the oral tradition for reading the Tanakh, hence the name Tiberian vocalization. It also included some of Ben Naftali and Babylonian innovations.^[2] Despite the comparatively late process of codification, some traditional sources and some Orthodox Jews believe the pronunciation and cantillation derive from the revelation at Sinai, since it is impossible to read the original text without pronunciations and cantillation pauses. The combination of a text (מִקְרָא *miqra*), pronunciation (דִּיקּוּד *niqqud*) and cantillation (מַעַט *te'amim*) enable the reader to understand both the simple meaning, as well as the nuances in sentence flow of the text.

Terminology

The three-part division reflected in the acronym “Tanakh” is well attested to in documents from the Second Temple period and in Rabbinic literature.^[3] During that period, however, “Tanakh” was not used. Instead, the proper title was *Mikra* (מִקְרָא, meaning “reading” or “that which is read”) because the biblical texts were read publicly. *Mikra* continues to be used in Hebrew to this day, alongside Tanakh, to refer to the Hebrew scriptures. In modern spoken Hebrew both are used interchangeably.^[4]

Codification of the books of Tanakh

Main article: Development of the Hebrew Bible canon

According to the Talmud (Bava Basra 14b-15a, Rashi to Megillah 3a, 14a), much of the contents of the Tanakh was compiled by the Men of the Great Assembly (*Anshei K'nesset HaGedolah*), a task completed in 450 BCE, and have remained unchanged since that date. Evidence suggests that the process of canonization occurred between 200 BCE and 200 CE. A popular position is that the Torah was canonized circa 400 BCE, the Prophets circa 200 BCE, and the Writings circa 100 CE,^[5] perhaps at a hypothetical Council of Jamnia. This position, however, is increasingly criticised by modern scholars. Some scholars argue that the Jewish canon was fixed by the Hasmonean dynasty (140-37 BCE).^[6] Today, there is no scholarly consensus as to when the Jewish canon was set.

Formal closure of the canon has often been ascribed to Rabbinic Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. Heinrich Graetz proposed in 1871 that it was concluded at a Council of Jamnia (or Yavne in Hebrew), some time in the period 70–90 CE. However, Rabbinical writings seem to indicate that certain books were disputed as accepted canon (such as Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and Esther, see also Antilegomena), but it may not necessarily be the case. The implication of the Talmud indicates that the books themselves were already accepted canon, but may have been misunderstood on philosophical or ecclesiastical grounds. The Talmud eliminates this misunderstanding.

The twenty-four books are also mentioned in the Midrash Koheleth 12:12.^[7] A slightly different accounting can be found in the book *Against Apion*, by the 1st-century Jewish historian Josephus, who describes 22 sacred books: the five books of Moses, thirteen histories, and four books of hymns to God and precepts for the conduct of human life.^[8] Some scholars have suggested that he considered Ruth part of Judges, and Lamentations part of Jeremiah; as the Christian translator Jerome recorded in the 4th century CE.^[9] Other scholars

suggest that at the time Josephus wrote, such books as Esther and Ecclesiastes were not yet considered canonical.

Books of the Tanakh

According to Jewish tradition, the Tanakh consists of **twenty-four** books. The Tanakh counts as one book each Samuel, Kings, Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah and counts Trei Asar (רשע ירת, the Twelve Prophets; literally “twelve”) as a single book.

Torah

The Torah (תּוֹרָה, literally “teaching”) consists of five books, commonly referred to as the “Five Books of Moses”. Printed versions of the Torah are often called *Chamisha Chumshei Torah* (הַרְוֹת יִשְׁמוּהָ הַשִּׁמְחָה, literally the “five five-sections of the Torah”), and informally a *Chumash*.

In Hebrew, the **five** books of the Torah are identified by the first prominent word in each book. The English names are derived from the Greek names given to the books in the Septuagint, which are based on the thematic content of each of the books, as follows:

1. (תִּשְׁאָרֵב / Bereshit) – Genesis
2. (שְׁמוֹת / Shemot) – Exodus
3. (וַיִּקְרָא / Vayikra) – Leviticus
4. (בְּמִדְבָּר / Bəmidbar) – Numbers
5. (דְּבָרִים / Devarim) – Deuteronomy

Nevi'im

Main article: Nevi'im

Nevi'im (נְבִיאִים, “Prophets”) consists of **eight** books. This division includes the books which, as a whole, cover the chronological era from the entrance of the Israelites into the Land until the Babylonian captivity of Judah (the “period of prophecy”). However, they exclude Chronicles, which covers the same period, as well as Ruth. The *Nevi'im* are often divided into the Earlier Prophets (מִיֵּאִיבֵנִי P retAL eht dna ,erutan ni lacirotsih yllareneg era hcihw, prophets ראשונים), (אֲחֵרִיבִיבִי seicehporp lanoitatrohxe erom niatnoc hcihw, prophets אחרונים).

Although most versions of the Old Testament count the number of books as totaling **twenty-one**, counting the books of Samuel and Kings as two books each, and the “Twelve Prophets” (or the minor prophets) as 12 books, Jewish tradition does not:

6. (יְהוֹשֻׁעַ / Yěhōshūa‘) – Joshua

7. (מיטפוש / Shophtim) – Judges
8. (שְׁמוּאֵל / Shēmū'ēl) – Samuel (I & II)
9. (מִלְכִּים / M'lakhim) – Kings (I & II)
10. (יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ / Yěsha'āyāhū) – Isaiah
11. (יֵרֵמְיָהוּ / Yirmēyāh) – Jeremiah
12. (יְחֶזְקֵאל / Yěhezqēl) – Ezekiel
13. The Twelve Prophets (רשע ירת)
 - a. (הוֹשֵׁעַ / Hōshēa') – Hosea
 - b. (יוֹאֵל / Yō'ēl) – Joel
 - c. (עָמוֹס / 'Āmōs) – Amos
 - d. (עֹבַדְיָה / 'Ōbhadhyāh) – Obadiah
 - e. (יוֹנָה / Yōnāh) – Jonah
 - f. (מִיכָיָה / Mīkhāyāh) – Micah
 - g. (נַחֻם / Nahūm) – Nahum
 - h. (חִבְקֻק / Hābhaqqūq) – Habakkuk
 - i. (צְפַנְיָה / Šəphanyāh) – Zephaniah
 - j. (חַגַּי / Haggai) – Haggai
 - k. (זְכַרְיָה / Zəkharyāh) – Zechariah
 - l. (מַלְאָכִי / Mal'ākhī) – Malachi

Ketuvim

Main article: Ketuvim

Ketuvim (כְּתוּבִים, “Writings”) are sometimes also known by the Greek title “Hagiographa” and consists of **eleven** books. These encompass all the remaining books, and include the Five Megillot (Five Scrolls). They are sometimes also divided into such categories as *Sifrei Emet* (תּוֹמַת יִרְפָּס, literally “Books of Truth”) of Psalms, Proverbs and Job (the Hebrew names of these three books form the Hebrew word for “truth” as an acrostic, and all three books have unique cantillation marks), the “wisdom books” of Job, Ecclesiastes, and Proverbs, the “poetry books” of Psalms, Lamentations and Song of Songs, and the “historical books” of Ezra-Nehemiah and Chronicles.

Although most versions of the Old Testament count the number of books as totaling **thirteen**, counting Ezra and Nehemiah as two books and I and II Chronicles as two, Jewish Tradition again does not.

Section Title	Common Order	Leningrad Codex	BHS Order ^[10]
The “Sifrei Emet,” “Books of Truth”	14. (תהלים / Tehillim) – Psalms 15. (משלי / Mishlei) – Proverbs 16. (איוב / Iyov)	14. Chronicles (I & II) [מימיה ירבד / Divrei Hayamim](Not part of Emet) 15. Psalms [מילהת / Millehat]	14. Psalms [להת / Tehilim] 15. Job [בויה / Iyov] 16. Proverbs [ילשמ / Mishlei]

	Iyyōbh) – Job	Tehilim] 16. Job [בויא / Iyov] 17. Proverbs [ילשמ / Mishlei]	
	17. (שיר השירים) / Shīr Hashīrīm) – Song of Songs 18. (רות / Rūth) – Ruth 19. (איכה / Eikhah) – Lamentations 20. (קהלת / Qōheleth) – Ecclesiastes 21. (אסתר / Estēr) – Esther	18. Ruth [רות / Rūth] 19. Song of Songs [ריש השירים / mirihsaH rihS / תלהק / Ecclesiastes [Kohélet] 21. Lamentations [הכיא / Eikhah] 22. Esther [רתסא / Esther]	17. Ruth [תור / Rut] 18. Song of Songs [מירישה ריש / Shir Hashirim] 19. Ecclesiastes [תלהק / Kohélet] 20. Lamentations [הכיא / Eikhah] 21. Esther [רתסא / Esther]
The “Five Megillot” or “Five Scrolls”	22. (דניאל / Dānī’ēl) – Daniel 23. (ארזע / v’Nechemia) – Ezra-Nehemiah 24. (מִימֵי יִרְבֹּד / Divrei Hayamim) – Chronicles (I & II)	23. Daniel [לאינד / Dani’el] 24. Ezra-Nehemiah [הימחנז ארזע / Ezra ve-Nehemiah]	22. Daniel [לאינד / Dani’el] 23. Ezra-Nehemiah [ארזע / ev ārzE’ / ונחמיה - Nēhemyāh] 24. Chronicles (I & II) [מִימֵי יִרְבֹּד / Divrei Hayamim]

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What you should know before we start studying each book

The books classed as poetical are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations. The term "poetical" is not to be taken as implying fancifulness or unreality, but as relating to form only. They are the books of the human experiences of the people of God under the various exercises of earthly life; but those experiences are, apart from the mere external setting, wrought in them by the Spirit, interpreted to us by the Spirit, and written by holy men of God as they were moved by the Spirit. While this is true of all these books, the Psalms included, the latter have also a prophetic character.

The Book Job

Outline

Structure of the Book

Hereby, detailed a brief summary of the Book of Job for Bible Study or Sunday School lessons. Definition of a summary: A summary, synopsis or recap is a shortened version of the original. The main purpose of a summary is as a simplification highlighting the major points from the original and much longer version of the subject. This article contains an overview of the key events and Bible People found in Job in the Bible. A brief synopsis the famous Bible Stories found in the scriptural text of the Book of Job contained in this short summary of Job.

Job begins with two introductory chapters, in the form of a narrative or prologue, that sets the stage for the rest of the book. Chapters 3 through 37 form the main body of the book. These chapters are poems in the form of dramatic dialogues between Job and his friends. Four additional chapters containing God's response to their arguments are also written in poetic form. The book ends with a final narrative or epilogue (42:7-17) that tells what happened to Job after these discussions had ended.

This prologue-body-epilogue format was often used in writings in the ancient world. The author of Job was a literary craftsman who knew how to bring words together in dramatic fashion to drive home his message.

The story of Job opens with a brief description of the man, his possessions, and his family. "Blameless and upright (1:1), he owned thousands of sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys. He also has seven sons and three daughters. In simple terms, Job was considered a wealthy man in the tribal culture of the ancient world. But Satan insists that the integrity of this upright man has never been tested. He accuses Job of serving God only because God has protected him and made him wealthy. God grants permission for the testing to begin.

In rapid fashion, Job's sons and daughters are killed and all his flocks are driven away by his enemies. Finally, Job himself is stricken with a terrible skin disease. In his sorrow he sits mourning on an ash heap, scraping his sores with a piece of pottery while he laments his misfortune. This is when Job's three friends - Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar - arrive to mourn with him and to offer comfort.

But instead of comforting Job, these friends launch into long lectures and philosophical debates to show Job the reason for his suffering. Their line of reasoning follows the generally accepted view of their time -that misfortune is always sent by God as punishment for sin. Job argues just as strongly that he is a righteous man who has done nothing to deserve such treatment at the hand of God. The truth revealed is that God had nothing to do with Job's suffering and that it was all done by the hand of Satan. It further reveals the deceptive character of man by exposing through the dialogue of Job's friends. Their conversation ranges from truthful to mistaken, but even when they speak a truth they speak falsely because a truth spoken out of context is a lie. In this manner does man deceive himself and others. Furthermore, after Job's three friends are finished speaking, Elihu, a young man, furthers the conversation against Job. He begins with wisdom, but quickly moves to twisting the words of Job to bear witness against him. He concludes by judging Job, who is righteous in the eyes of God, as a hypocrite. Thus Elihu stands in place of God and falsely speaks for the Almighty a treacherous sin.

Finally, after Job and his friends have debated this question at length and have failed to arrive at a satisfactory solution, God Himself speaks from a whirlwind. He does not enter their discussion about why the righteous suffer; He reveals Himself as the all-powerful, all-knowing God. God's message to Job is that He does not have to justify or explain His actions. He is the sovereign, all-powerful God who always does what is right, although His ways may be beyond human understanding.

Job is humbled by this outpouring of God's power, and he learns to trust where he cannot understand. This leads to his great affirmation of faith, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye seeth Thee" (42:5). God so orders Job to pray for the misgivings of his three friends, but not one such as Elihu whom falsely spoke for the Lord (42:9). Then the book closes with the

birth of more sons and daughters and Job's rise to a position of even greater wealth and prominence. Job lived out his additional years as a happy, contented man: "So Job died, being old and full of days" (42:17).

Authorship and Date

No one knows who wrote the Book of Job. A few scholars have taken the position that it may have been written by Moses. Others have suggested that the patriarch Job himself may have written this account of his experiences. But these theories have no solid evidence to support them. The only thing we can say for certain is that the book was written by an unknown author.

The exact date of the book's writing is still a mystery. Some believe its unknown author put it in writing as late as the second century B.C. Others insist it must have been written about 450 B.C., long after the Jews returned from captivity in Babylonia. But many conservative scholars assign the writing of the book to the time of king Solomon, about 950 B.C. Historical evidence favors this date, since this was the golden age of biblical Wisdom Literature.

Historical Setting

The events described in the Book of Job must have occurred many centuries before they were finally written. Job may have lived during the time of the patriarch Abraham, about 2000 B.C. like Abraham, Job's wealth was measured in flocks and herds. In patriarchal fashion, Job's married children were a part of his household, living in separate tents but subject to his rule as leader of the family clan.

This story of Job and his misfortunes was probably passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation for several hundred years. Finally, it was put in writing by an unknown author probably during Solomon's time -thus assuring its preservation for all future generations.

Theological Contribution

The Book of Job teaches us to trust in God for all circumstances. When we suffer, it usually is a fruitless effort to try to understand the reasons for the difficulty. Sometimes the righteous must suffer without knowing the reason why; that is why it is important to learn to trust God in everything.

This masterful book also shows very clearly that God is not captive to His world, His people, or our views of His nature. God is free; he is subject to no will but His own. He is not bound by our understanding or by our lack of it. Job also discovered that God is a God of great power and majesty. When we see

how great He is, we realize just how little we are. Like Job, we want to bow down in humble submission.

The book of Job also teaches us that God is good, just, and fair in His dealings. He restored Job's fortunes and gave him more than he had ever enjoyed. God always replaces the darkness of our existence with light of His presence when we remain faithful to Him.

Special Considerations

The dialogue sections of the book are written in poetry. Great truths are often expressed in such poetic language. These great truths are worth the slow, reflective reading it sometimes takes to grasp their meaning. Great art like that in this book often challenges our understanding. That is why we need to come back to it again and again.

What main lessons can we learn from the Book of Job?

In Job, we see a man who God allows to be directly attacked by Satan. He is an example of faithfulness as he loses everything important to him yet remains faithful to God. Its purpose is to illustrate God's sovereignty and faithfulness during a time of great suffering.

- In chapters 1-3, God tests Job's faithfulness through allowing Satan to attack him. God told Satan, "*Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him*" (1:12). Through Job's trials, all is lost including his health, his wife even tells him to curse God and commit suicide, but he remains strong and faithful, "*Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.*" (1:22).
- From chapters 4-37, Job's friends give him plenty of bad advice, in rounds of discussion. They mistakenly blame his sufferings on his personal sins rather than God testing and growing Job. One of them was half-correct in that God wanted to humble him, but this was only a part of God's test.
- In chapters 38-42, God speaks to Job and restores him. God knows that Job has received incorrect guidance from his friends, "*Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?*" God fittingly declares that humans do not know everything. Then He humbles Job by asking a series of questions that could never be answered by anyone other than Almighty God; for example, "*Have you understood the expanse of the earth? Tell Me, if you know all this*". God then brings him to an understanding that believers don't always know what God is doing in their lives.

In the end, Job answers God by saying, “*I have declared that which I did not understand*”. God then blessed Job with twice as much as he had before his trials began.

Job Detailed Outline

Job 1:1-5

Prologue: Job is introduced giving an indication of his character and history.

Job 1:6-12

Satan approaches the Lord accusing Job and seeking to test his faith. Satan says that Job will surely curse the Lord if he strikes everything he has.

Job 1:12-22

Job is given a series of tests. He loses all his possessions including his loved ones. Despite the suffering and tragedy, Job still praises the Lord for His goodness. “In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.”

Job 2:1-6

Satan approaches the Lord once again stating that a man will give up everything to save his own life.

Job 2:6-10

Job is tested once again by being afflicted with painful sores over his body. Even still, “Job did not sin in what he said.”

Job 2:11-13

Job’s three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar come to comfort job in his time of misery. They wept over his condition being left speechless due to his suffering.

Job 3:1-26

Job curses the day of his birth wishing that he had not been born. He also questions why life is given to those who live in misery and turmoil, especially since God determines the steps of a man and God's plans are a mystery.

Job 4 - 5

Eliphaz replies that Job should have confidence in his own righteousness. If Job is innocent, then surely God will be just. And yet, humans are just houses of clay. We are born to trouble because we are mere mortal. "Blessed is the man whom God corrects... For he wounds... but he also heals." In essence, Eliphaz is telling Job that his troubles is the Lord's rebuke or a form of punishment.

Job 6 - 7

Job replies by saying his suffering would outweigh the sand of the seas. He says, "Do I have any power to help myself?" Job has lost all hope due to the immense suffering, and now he only desires death. On top of this, when his friends come to comfort, instead of encouraging him, they tell him that God is punishing him. And yet, Job feels they are being unjust for accusing him.

In chapter 7

Job addresses the Lord wondering why God thinks so highly of man that he continually tests him. He wonders why the Lord does not forgive or pardon his sins; and he wonders what he, a mere man, has done to the Lord to be deserving of such a fate. He also stresses the emptiness of death, having been lost to the grave never to return.

In essence, Job complains in the bitterness of his soul. He complains of the way he is being treated. He acknowledges God's sovereignty over all things by addressing the fact that God is in control of his situation, but Job wonders why God would target him.

Job 8

Bildad replies arguing for God's justice. If Job is blameless, then God will uphold him. God will bring justice and do what is right.

He will yet fill Job's mouth with laughter and his lips with shouts of joy

Job 9-10

Job replies saying he knows this to be true, but asks, "How can a mortal be righteous before God?" Throughout verse 9, Job argues that being merely a man, he can do nothing to make himself righteous before God. He says concerning God, "He is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we confront each other in court. If only there were someone to arbitrate between us... so that his terror would frighten me no more."

In chapter 10

Job makes his defense as if speaking to God. Job argues that he is just a man created by God. If God is angered by him, then why is he even allowed to live? God created him, why destroy him? Even if Job is innocent, he cannot lift his head for he is full of shame and drowned in affliction. If Job lifts his head high, as though he were righteous, God would increase his anger against such pride. As such, Job asks God to turn away so that He might have a moment of peace without God's anger against him before he enters eternal death. Simply stated, Job is asking at least for a happy life until his death.

Job 11

Zophar replies accusing Job of sin though Job claims to be blameless. He tells Job to repent and that by doing so his troubles will be no more. In essence, he blames the circumstances of his situation on the sin of job, and if job would repent, then he would be blessed.

Job 12,13,14

Job replies by arguing, "To God belong wisdom and power." God is in control of all things. In essence, Job is arguing that he cannot save himself. No matter what job does, he cannot make himself righteous before God.

And yet, in chapter 13, Job wishes to argue his defense. If Job is truly a mere mortal, nothing in comparison, why does God have

such anger against him? Job asks, “Will you torment a windblown leaf?”

In chapter 14

Job argues for his defense on the basis that man is nothing. We are born into sin, and we wither away. Therefore, how can God bring judgment upon a man whose days are numbered with no hope? And yet, Job says, “You will call and I will answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made. Surely then you will count my steps but not keep track of my sin. My offenses will be sealed up in a bag; you will cover my own sin.”

Job 15

Eliphaz replies by continuing the accusation of sin against job. He argues that “All his days the wicked man suffers torment.” More or less, he is saying that Job deserves the suffering he is enduring because Job has sinned.

Job 16-17

Job replies by saying “miserable comforters are you all!” He then speaks of God’s anger toward him and how he has been turned over to the wicked. Yet, toward the end of chapter 16, he acknowledges his intercessor and friend who is in heaven pleading with God on his behalf.

In chapter 17

He battles with his suffering. He has been brought to shame, “a man in whose face people spit.” If he hopes for death, does he even have hope? Is death something to hope for? Will hope “go down to the gates of death? Will we descend together into the dust?”

Job 18

Bildad tells Job to come to his senses and listen to their reasoning. He then goes on to tell about how calamity overtakes the wicked. “The lamp of the wicked is snuffed out.” “The memory of him perishes from the earth.” “Such is the dwelling of an evil man; such is the place of one who knows not God.”

Job 19

Job replies “How long will you torment me and crush me with words?” Job goes on to tell how God has brought all these infirmities upon him. Occasion of injustice as he cries to God for help and receives no response. Instead, “the hand of God has struck” him.

Even still, Job has a small bit of hope as he says, “I know that my Redeemer lives.” Though Job will perish, there is another who will save him. Because of this he says, “in my flesh I will see God.” At last, Job warns his friends that if they continue to hound him without offering mercy, they should fear the sword themselves for God will bring justice.

Job 20

Zophar is encouraged to reply due to Job’s rebuke. He tells of how the wicked may have blessings and joy for a time, but due to their wickedness they will receive justice by facing terrible tragedy for their sinfulness. “In the midst of his plenty distress will overtake him; the full force of misery will overtake him.” Zophar ends his exposition by stating, “Such is the fate God allots the wicked.” By this, Zophar is suggesting that Job is being punished for his wickedness.

Job 21

Job replies by pointing out how the wicked prosper on earth. “Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing power?... Their homes are safe and free from fear.” Job continues by saying concerning the wicked, “Yet they say to God, ‘Leave us alone! We have no desire to know your ways.’” He argues that the evil man is spared from the day of calamity and dies peacefully in the grave without being repaid for the injustice he has caused. As such, Job is arguing that they have no case against him. They cannot judge him as being a wicked man just because calamity has befallen him. He says, “So how can you console me with your nonsense?”

Job 22

Eliphaz replies by attacking him even further accusing Job of specific sins. He argues even further that Job's predicament is due to the wrong things he did. Eliphaz judges him, rather than showing him mercy, and says, "Submit to God and be at peace with him; in this way prosperity will come to you."

Job 23-24

Job replies in complaint wishing that he could speak with God and argue his case. He believes God is just and after presenting his case, he "would be delivered forever from my judge." But, where is God on earth? He cannot be seen. Even still, Job states that God knows Job "has kept to His way without turning aside." Then Job admits his fear of the Almighty since "He does whatever he pleases."

In chapter 24:

Job wonders why God has not set times for judgment to bring justice. He stresses all the injustices that occur over the earth and how "the souls of the wounded cry out for help, but God charges no one with wrongdoing." Yet, Job speaks of death and how "the grave snatches away those who have sinned." Even though a person may be exulted on earth for a short time during their life, in death they are gone.

Job 25

Bildad responds by asking, "How then can a man be righteous before God?" God is far greater than man who is but a maggot in comparison. How can a son of man be pure? By this question, Bildad is thinking in terms of the works of man.

Job 26-31

Job responds by declaring the great power of the Lord. Job continues in chapter 27 by saying that as long as he lives, he will not let go of his righteousness. Rather, may his enemies be like the wicked who have no hope once God takes away their life. "He lies down wealthy, but will do so no more; when he opens his eyes all is gone." Job's defense is that God brings justice, not by calamity

here on earth, but in the grave where all man's works are gone and meaningless.

In chapter 28:

Job speaks of how man searches for treasure in the earth, but what of wisdom, the everlasting treasure. (Wisdom of the Lord is to be desired as it makes one righteous.) "But where can wisdom be found?" "God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells." God has "confirmed it and tested it." The Lord has said to man, "The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom."

In chapter 29:

Job speaks of his early days while walking with the Lord and the good works he performed earning glory among men. They listened to Job's wisdom due to his great success. However, in chapter 30, he says, "But now they mock me, men younger than I, whose father I would have disdained." Job's dignity is "driven away as by the wind."

He continues by moaning about his suffering and how the Lord does not answer. In chapter 31, he recounts all the righteous deeds he has done. He has pursued the Lord and his ways. If he has done wrong, he says, "then let my arm fall from the shoulder." Job has feared the Lord and kept his ways. He has kept himself from sin. But, if Job has sinned and the "land cries out against" him, then "let briars come up instead of wheat." Job believes he has done nothing wrong and wishes to give a defense before God, but if he is wrong in this, then in humility he accepts justice. Let his punishment come.

Job 32-37

At Job's final exposition, the three men stopped answering him because "he was righteous in his own eyes." But another named Elihu, who was younger, had been listening and "became angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God." So Elihu responds, firstly by arguing for his case as he is younger in years.

In chapter 33:

Elihu argues that Job is not right in saying, “I am pure and without sin.” Elihu argues that “God is greater than man.” Elihu also argues that God speaks in many ways through dreams and visions or through our experiences. In addition, Elihu argues that God does many things to a man to keep him from the pit. If a man prays to God and finds favor with him, God restores him to his righteousness.

In chapter 34:

Elihu continues by accusing Job of sin. “What man is like Job, who drinks scorn like water?” Elihu argues that God does not wrong, and thus, “He repays a man for what he has done.” He argues that God brings justice on earth and that people receive what they deserve. Thus, he accuses Job further by saying “To his sin he adds rebellion,” because Job will not fall down and repent.

In chapter 35:

Elihu argues that sin and righteousness have no affect upon the Lord. “Your wickedness affects only a man like yourself, and your righteousness only the sons of men.” He concludes that God “does not answer when men cry out because of the arrogance of the wicked.”

In chapter 36:

Elihu continues to argue that God exalts the righteous forever, but if men are “held fast by cords of affliction,” God tells them that they have “sinned arrogantly.” He “commands them to repent of their evil.” Elihu argues that God is “wooing [Job] from the jaws of distress.” He comments on how great God is, “beyond our understanding.” He speaks of how God governs by filling his hands with lightning and commanding it to strike its mark. In chapter 37, he continues in works. The Lord had allowed Job to be tested and Job overcame, not by his works, but by the Lord’s grace. In the end, it was the Lord’s favor upon Job that saved him. The Lord favored Job because Job had sought the Lord continually crying to Him for help and justice. Job knew God loved Him, despite all the trials, and this was shown at the last moment when Job quickly repented upon hearing the Lord’s questioning.

Job's friends:

However, could only see things superficially. They blamed Job's sin for the affliction he faced. Rather than show mercy upon Job in the hardship he was facing, offering Job their love, they judged Job for his sinfulness. They assumed that these bad things were happening to Job because of a wicked heart. Obviously, they were wrong for supposing such. God is merciful and loving. He has a day set aside for judgment, and though we may face affliction here on earth, it is not God's judgment.

Job friends:

Continually told Him to repent. However, they were judging Job based upon His actions and not his heart. Job argued that he could not be made righteous before the Lord. All he could do is plead with the Lord for His mercy. His works could not save him from the afflictions as God had allowed these circumstances to befall him. Despite his arguments, the friends continued with the concept that God would bless with prosperity Job if he would just submit to God.

This idea, that God prospers those who do good and scolds those who do bad, is obviously not the way in which God works. If we were to base God's blessings upon our works, then all humanity would be doomed. What we see going on in the world does not reflect God's justice.

As Christians, prosperity and happiness is not our goal. We are seeking God's best which often comes with trial and blessing. God has called His people to be Holy just as He is Holy. We were not created for pleasure, but for God. Affliction or calamity in the life of any person is no indication of their relationship with God. Truly, God does whatever He pleases, and whatever pleases God is absolutely good; it is the best. Christ carried His cross unto death so that others may have life. Likewise, in our lives, we are called to carry our cross so that God may be glorified in us. When affliction strikes, let us trust in God who works all things for good. He has a purpose for everything including calamity. As such, Elihu concludes, "We cannot draw up our case because of our darkness. Should he be told that I want to speak?" He then says, "The Almighty is beyond our reach."

Job 38-39

Then the Lord answers Job out of a storm by telling of His might and power. The questions Job. “Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation?” The Lord asks many such questions.

Job 40:1-2

The Lord says, “Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!”

Job 40:3-5

Job responds by saying, “I am unworthy – how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer – twice, but I will say no more.”

Job 40:6-34 and Job 41

The Lord again questions Job by saying “Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?” This is followed with a plethora of questions.

Job 42:1-6

Job quotes the Lord, “Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?” In response, Job says “Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.” Job then repents because he has seen the Lord and how great He is.

Job 42:7-9

The Lord is angered by Job’s three friends because they “have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.” Therefore, they are commanded to ask for Job’s prayers and make a sacrifice. They do as commanded.

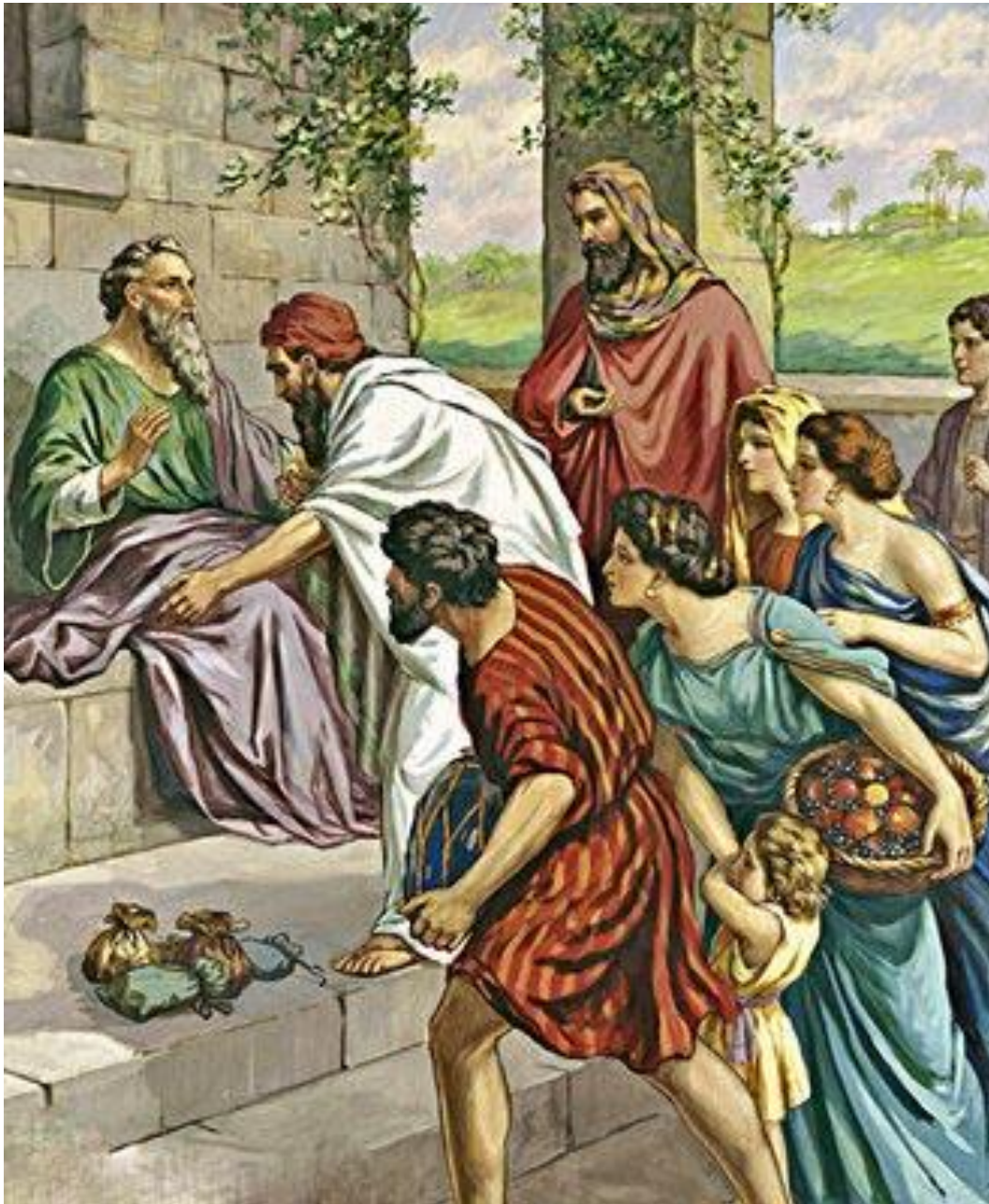
Job 42:10-17

Then the Lord blesses Job with twice as before. Job’s siblings “comforted and consoled him over all the trouble the Lord has

brought upon him.” Job lived a long and full life reaching 140 years.

Conclusion

Job was a servant from the Lord who delighted in His ways. He was righteous by grace through faith, and his faith was made manifest.



Commentary on Book of Job

CHAPTER 1

1-2. Prologue: Job's testing

1:1-5. Job's testing and integrity

1:6-12. Satan's accusation

1:13-2:13. Job's affliction

JOB, HIS FAMILY AND HIS PROMINENCE (vv.1-5)

Uz is considered to have been in the area between Syria and Babylon. There Job lived with his wife, seven sons and three daughters. He is first spoken of as "blameless and upright, one who feared God and shunned evil." Thus there is no doubt he was born again, though, as with many believers, he needed to know the heart of God as he did not know it (vv.1-2).

His possessions are recorded as being remarkably great, 7000 sheep, 3000 camels, 500 pair of oxen, 500 female donkeys and a very large household, that is, many servants. In fact, he enjoyed the reputation of being the greatest of all the people of the east (v.3). It is frequently the case that when one is seeking to honour God by walking honourably, he will increase in wealth, in spite of the fact that he is not making wealth his object. There is no reason to doubt what Job said in chapter 29:11-17 as regards his genuine care for the poor, the fatherless, those perishing, the widow and the lame, etc. So that he was definitely not greedy of gain, but used his wealth in kindness toward those in need.

His sons made a practice of feasting, each on a special day and inviting their sisters to eat and drink with them (v.4). This does not necessarily imply that they were given up to a life of self-indulgence and pleasure, but when each season of feasting was finished, Job considered that the danger of such pleasure might be to lead them into sin and disregard for God. Therefore Job would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings for all of his children, thus sanctifying them, that is, setting them apart from the world of the ungodly. This is another evidence that he lived in the time of Genesis, in which book burnt offerings only are mentioned. In the nation Israel sin offerings, trespass offerings and peace offerings were later introduced in Exodus and Leviticus.

A LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES (vv.6-12)

Only God could reveal what is written in this section, and faith recognises it must be seriously considered. The sons of God presented themselves before God. These sons of God are angels, though the designation can be true of men also, as in Genesis 6:2 which evidently refers to the line of Seth in contrast to the line of Cain; and in Galatians 3:26, where all believers today are said to be sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus. In all of these cases the son's place is to represent the Father, though in Genesis 6:2 they failed to do so. The sons of God here in Job 1:6 appear to be unfallen angels, for fallen angels are not sons of God. Satan came among them, though not one of them.

In answer to the Lord's question as to where he had come from, Satan replied, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth in it" (v.7). This establishes the fact that Satan is not omnipresent, as God is. Satan can be only in one place at a time, however quickly he may travel. Yet he has many agents, evil spirits, who carry on his wicked work throughout the world, and we know that work is prospering dreadfully. Some have questioned too whether Satan knows our thoughts. Absolutely not! Only God knows the hearts and the thoughts of mankind. He only is omniscient.

When Satan came among the sons of God, God questioned Satan as to whether he had considered God's servant Job, concerning whom there was none like him in all the earth, a blameless, upright man who feared God and shunned evil (v.8). Satan's reply showed how void of respect he was toward God. He imputed to Job the same self-centred motives that animate Satan. He said that God had so greatly blessed Job that it was this profitable existence that caused Job to fear God. He forgot to consider that Job's wealth had been only gradually accumulating, as we are sure was the case, for his increase was the result of his faithfulness to God, - not the other way around. In fact, Satan admitted that Job's possessions had "increased in the land" (v.19), so he had not always had such possessions.

Satan boldly asserted that if God would "touch" all that Job had, in other words, take his possessions from him, Job would curse God to His face! (v.11). It seems almost amazing that Satan would dare to speak this way to the Creator of heaven and earth, but "a lying tongue hateth those who are injured by it" (Prov.26:28 - JND trans.). When one lies against another, hatred moves him to do so, and Satan's ties against God are prompted by hatred. Also, one moved by hatred does not stop to consider how foolish his words or actions are.

A matter of great importance is made clearly manifest here. Satan realised that he could do nothing to Job without God's permission. But God did give Satan

permission to do as he pleased with Job's possessions, though not to touch his person. Did God allow this only to prove that Satan was speaking falsely? No, for God had work to do with Job himself, to accomplish greater blessing for him than he could have imagined was possible. God would use the enmity of Satan to this end, just as later He used Job's three friends for this purpose.

JOB LOSES HIS POSSESSIONS AND HIS CHILDREN (vv.13-22)

Satan marshalled his forces concertedly against Job, so that Job had news of four sudden calamities that deprived him of all his possessions and all of his children on the same day. The first messenger told him that a marauding band of enemies (the Sabeans) had killed Job's servants who were in charge of his oxen and donkeys, and had stolen the animals (vv.14-15). Satan had allowed one man to live, who carried this message to Job. But while he was still speaking, another messenger came to tell Job that fire had fallen from heaven and burned up Job's sheep and servants, only sparing this one man to bear the message (v.16). It was of course Satan who had power to bring this fire, whatever the source may have been, but the servant called it "the fire of God."

While this messenger was still speaking, another came with the message that three bands of Chaldeans had raided the habitat of the camels, stealing the camels and killing the servants; though Satan had allowed this one man to escape and bring the message to Job (v.17).

But the most crushing blow of all followed immediately. While this man was speaking, another came to inform Job that while his sons and daughters were feasting in their oldest brother's house, a great wind (perhaps a tornado) struck the house, destroying it utterly and killing all of Job's ten children (vv.18-19). The messenger said he alone had escaped to bring the report to Job. He may have been one of the servants of Job's son. But Satan allowed these four messengers to remain alive so that Job would receive the news rapidly, blow upon blow. Satan designed these things with the object of totally devastating Job, so that he would curse God.

What must Satan have thought when he found himself completely defeated? Job arose and tore his robe (a sign of repentance), shaved his head, a picture of his being exposed before God in a condition of weakness, then fell to the ground in humble prostration before his Creator. All of these are negatives, implying denial of self. But lastly, and most important of all, he worshiped, giving God the place of highest honour and dignity (v.20). To those who have no faith in the living God, worship is one thing they would not think of considering. It is natural rather to bitterly complain that they do not deserve the treatment they are receiving. Thus the majority of men would be willing to be deceived by the

same selfish motives that energise Satan, rather than to be moved by a true response of faith to all the bitter experiences of life. Job's words then should deeply impress themselves on every person who hears them, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (v.21). A complaining attitude will never change matters for the better, while a thankful heart will be more greatly blessed in the end.

Therefore, what an answer is Job's attitude to those who claim that their hard circumstances are an excuse for sinning! "In all this Job did not sin nor charge God foolishly" (v.22). Many since Job's time have proven this though enduring terrible afflictions and trouble. Rather than alienating them from God, their troubles have driven them into His presence to find comfort and joyful communion with the Lord. Job still had much to learn, as we oft do, yet his response to trouble shows the reality of his faith in the Lord.

CHAPTER 2

SATAN INFLICTS BODILY SUFFERING ON HIM (vv.1-10),

Another day comes when Satan presents himself to God among the sons of God, and his response to God's first question was the same as in Chapter 1. Then God faces him with the fact that Job had not done what Satan said he would if deprived of his possessions (v.3). Certainly Satan ought to have acknowledged he had been wrong and to have apologised for his manifest error. But Satan is like too many people. Instead of admitting wrong, they want to bolster their pride by introducing another possibility which is just as faulty as Satan's first claim.

Satan's words, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life" are sadly true of an unbeliever, but faith is something that Satan does not understand. He confidently asserted that if God would afflict Job bodily, Job would surely curse God to His face (vv.4-5).

Therefore God gave Satan permission to do as he pleased in afflicting Job's body, while sparing his life (v.6). It may seem heartless on God's part to give Satan such permission, but God's pure love was in this in a way that unbelief cannot understand, for this eventually worked for greater blessing. But Satan did show himself heartless, for he wanted only to accomplish Job's downfall.

We may wonder how Satan has ability to inflict a man with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head (v.7), but this does show that Satan can cause physical ills as well as promoting spiritual falsehood, and he will use

all of these to the fullest advantage he can. But thank God, Satan cannot steal away the faith of the child of God! In fact, when Satan has done his worst, he vanishes from the scene, for we do not read any more about him in this book. Though he was so completely defeated, we do not read that he ever honestly admitted defeat.

However, we read much more of Job. Sitting in an ash heap, he used a potsherd to scrape the sores that pained him. What a dreadful contrast to his former prosperity and dignity! Also, his wife, his only near relative remaining, was not only no help to him, but practically abusive. She could not understand his uncomplaining attitude, and asked him, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity?" But worse still, she advised him to "curse God and die!" (v.9).

How true and faithful was Job's response! - "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" (v.10). Job did not call her a foolish woman, but rightly said she was speaking as one. He was careful still to guard his lips, so that in all this he did not sin. This is not the usual way in which men would be affected, and his patient self-restraint is surely to be admired.

THREE FRIENDS COME (vv.11-13)

Though Satan had been defeated, yet God had serious lessons still for Job to learn, so that He allowed three of his friends to come in order that Job would express to them what was really in his heart, and at the same time that his friends would learn the sin of their own hearts. These friends had made an appointment to come together to commiserate with Job and comfort him (v.11). This was their avowed object, though they actually went further than this.

On arrival they were deeply affected in seeing Job's condition, they wept and tore their garments, sprinkling dust on their heads in token of humbly feeling their compassion for him (v.12). They must have had a great deal of regard for Job, for they sat down with him for seven days, not speaking (v.13).

CHAPTER 3

3-14. The first cycle of speeches

Ch. 3. Job's first speech

Ch. 4-5. Eliphaz' first speech

Ch. 6-7. Job's reply

Ch. 8. Bildad's first speech

Ch. 9-10. Job answers Bildad

Ch. 11. Zophar's first speech

Ch. 12-14. Job's reply to Zophar

JOB'S BITTER COMPLAINT (vv.1-26)

Though Job would not dare to curse God for his trouble, yet it seems that the presence of his friends only caused a stronger, gradual build-up of bitter distress in the heart of Job, so that eventually the thoughts of his heart broke out in words of painful complaint.

WISHING HE HAD NEVER BEEN BORN (vv.1-10)

Job did not even now charge God foolishly, but he did curse the day of his birth. This was not directly blaming God, but however little he realised it, he was indirectly blaming God, for it was God who gave him life. The language of Job is amazingly graphic, as indeed are all his succeeding speeches and those of his friends. Job's grief was so deep that he did not even consider that what he was saying was an impossibility. How could the day perish in which Job was born? (v.3). How could history reverse itself? That day had passed long before and at the time was a day of light that a man-child had been born into the world. Could Job's words change that light to darkness? He mentions God once in this section, desiring that God would ignore that day (v.4). Later Job would thank God he had been born, and that thankfulness will endure for eternity. But when trouble comes such as Job was called to bear, we do not tend to think soberly and with calm deliberation, though wishful thinking will never accomplish anything. The doors of Job's mother's womb had been opened long ago (v.10), and Job knew this could never be reversed. But he was moved by his anguish, not by faith.

WISHING HE HAD DIED AT BIRTH (vv.11-19)

If it could not be that Job could reverse the fact of his birth, yet he now expressed the wish that he had died at birth. Was there any more hope of this than that he had never been born? Of course not! If only he had died, he says, he would be at rest (v.13). In death at least, he affirms, the wicked cease from troubling, the weary are at rest, the prisoners are released and the slave is free from his master (vv.17-19). But wishing is not facing facts as they are. Faith faces facts and gives God credit for doing what He knows is best. But Job's faith had become very weak.

WISHING FOR DEATH NOW (vv.20-26)

In these verses Job comes closer to facing facts as they actually were. He was in misery and bitterness of soul, and he questions why life should be given to one in such a state, though he longs for death and it does not come. It is good, however, that he does not even consider suicide, as many would do today who are in such a condition. Satan had been told to spare Job's life while being allowed to make him suffer so grievously, and God knew Job's sufferings were necessary to accomplish results of great blessing. So that Job's wish for death was not according to the will of God. Job would not die until God ordained it so.

In verse 25 Job records the fact that the thing he greatly feared had come upon him. Such a thing often happens. He had not been feeling secure and confident of continuing in constant prosperity. He greatly feared that he might be reduced as now he found himself to be. Sometimes people are mortally afraid they might contract a certain disease, and that disease overtakes them. Why? Is it not because God is showing them that His grace is sufficient for them even in the most dreaded circumstances? Thus Job was not at ease, not quiet; he had no rest, yet trouble came (v.26). He needed to learn the heart of God as he did not know it.

CHAPTER 4

ELIPHAZ: COMMENDATION TWISTED INTO REBUKE (vv.1-6)

The three friends of Job could only think of God's justice in reference to Job's sufferings, and had no idea of God's love. Eliphaz no doubt thought he would help Job by his remarkable knowledge and ability in speaking, but his diagnosis of Job's ailment was totally wrong. He begins gently and kindly, "If one attempts a word with you, will you become weary? But who can withhold himself from speaking? (v.12). Then he rightly reminds Job that he (Job) had instructed many, he had strengthened weak hands, his words had supported those who stumbled, he had strengthened the feeble knees (vv.3-4). Since this was true, should Eliphaz not have given due weight to such excellent character on Job's part, and expressed some genuine appreciation of it?

Instead, Eliphaz virtually thrust a sword into Job's soul by criticising him for being depressed when trouble comes to him (v.5). Why did Eliphaz not do as he says Job had done in the past, strengthening the weak hands and upholding those who stumbled? It is easy for us to discern what we think is wrong in another without providing for him what might be for his help. He asks Job, "Is not your reverence your confidence?" Because Job had true reverence toward God he had confidence in regard to all his former life. Also he speaks of Job's integrity

(which he knew to be true) being his hope, that is, that Job had a right to look forward to the future because of his integrity.

ELIPHAZ INFERS THAT JOB HAD SINNED (vv.7-11)

Eliphaz therefore comes quickly to the conclusion that Job must have badly compromised his reverence and his integrity, since he was now reduced to a pathetic state. He had absolutely no evidence that Job had sinned but he considered Job's condition evidence enough that he must have sinned. He says, "Who ever perished being innocent?" But Job had not perished." "Where were the upright ever cut off?" But Job was not cut off. God might indeed cut off a wicked man because he continued to refuse God's reproofs, as Proverbs 29:1 tells us, "He who is often rebuked and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, And that without remedy." But there was not the slightest indication that this applied to Job, whom God said was "a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil" (Job.1:8).

In verse 8 Eliphaz appeals to his own observation as though this was a final authority. He had seen that those who plough iniquity and sow trouble reap the same. This was true enough, but had he **seen** Job ploughing iniquity or sowing trouble? Certainly not! But he assumed that since Job was suffering trouble, he must have secretly engaged in evil. He does not even consider the difference between a believer and an unbeliever in the way in which God deals toward them. An unbeliever, because of his sin, may perish by the blast of God and by the breath of His anger. The strength of this evil may be compared to the roaring of a lion, but even the teeth of the young lions would be broken. Since Job could be compared to a lion in the previous strength of his wealth, now he was like a lion that perishes or the lioness losing her cubs. Eliphaz does not say this to encourage Job, however, but to imply that Job must have brought this calamity on himself by secret sin.

A SOUL-STIRRING VISION (vv.12-21)

Eliphaz describes in most graphic language a night vision he had experienced in quiet secrecy that had a profound effect upon him. He was evidently in a deep sleep when he was shaken by a paroxysm of fear and trembling (v.14). A spirit passed before his face, causing his hair to stand up. A form was present, but undiscernible in its appearance. No doubt God intended by this to awaken the serious attention of Eliphaz, and He succeeded.

The vision was not the most vital thing here, but the message to which the vision drew attention. After a brief silence, Eliphaz heard a voice, "Can mortal man be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker? If He puts no trust in His servants, if he charges His angels with error, how much more

those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before a moth? They are broken in pieces from morning to evening; they perish forever, with no one regarding. Does not their own excellence go away? They die, even without wisdom" (vv.17-21).

How true and applicable are such **words to all of mankind**, but Eliphaz was applying it only to Job, not to himself, because Eliphaz did not consider himself "crushed before a moth" and "broken in pieces." This had happened to Job, so that Eliphaz considered his vision as applying directly to Job. But a vision or dream is intended to apply directly to the one who has it, and Eliphaz missed that one important fact. Similarly, we may hear good ministry which we think to be more applicable to others than to ourselves. Eliphaz could see that Job's excellence was going away, but the fact was that the excellence of Eliphaz would go away too, as in the case of all men. It appeared to him that Job's condition was such that he was about to die, but death would eventually claim Eliphaz also. Job did not die until years later, yet "it is appointed unto all men once to die" (Heb. 9:27). If Eliphaz had learned the lesson God intended, he would not have spoken to Job the way he did.

CHAPTER 5

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS BY ELIPHAZ (vv.1-27)

Eliphaz suggests to Job that he call out to creatures for help, even to holy ones - holy men or angels, - and see if anyone will answer him (v.1). He is implying that Job is not seeking God in his affliction, while in contrast to Job, Eliphaz claims, "As for me, I would seek God, and to God I would commit my cause" (v.8). He fears that Job has been guilty of too closely resembling a foolish man (v.2), and warns him as to what he had observed in the foolish taking root (v.3) but was suddenly exposed to a curse, his sons being far from safety, being crushed in the gate (v.3), Job's sons had died suddenly. Was Job therefore a foolish man? Eliphaz did not say so, but he implied that Job might be perilously close to such a charge, for Eliphaz had observed foolish people suffering, and reasoned that since Job was suffering as he did there must be in Job something seriously wrong. Job's harvest (all the substance he had gained) was eaten up (v.5). Why? For he says affliction does not come from the dust or trouble from the ground (v.6). In other words, trouble does not happen by chance. This is true, for there is no doubt that God is behind it; and the observation of Eliphaz in verse 7 is very true also, "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." Eliphaz was thinking of Job when he said this. But trouble is the portion of all mankind.

"But as for me," Eliphaz says, "I will seek God, and to God I would commit my cause" (v.8). Of course it is good to do this, but Eliphaz says it as though he was

above Job's level. He continues to speak rightly of how great God is, doing great things, unsearchable and marvellous, sending rain for man's blessing, lifting up the lowly to places of dignity (vv.9-11). But Job at the time was not lifted up, so Eliphaz thought Job was not right with God!

On the other hand, he said God "frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that they cannot carry out their plans. He catches the wise in their own craftiness, and the counsel of the cunning comes quickly upon them" (vv.12-13). He does not at first accuse Job of deceit, but implies this might be the case since Job's plans had been frustrated. Eliphaz had observed that such things happened to crafty men, but why did he not also observe that the righteous oftentimes suffered similar frustration?

He had observed too that the Lord saves the needy from the sword and from the mouth (the cruel accusations) of powerful men and from their persecution, so that the poor have hope and injustice is silenced (vv.15-16). This is true in the long run: God will certainly silence injustice. But in the meantime injustice often seems to prevail, and for this Eliphaz had no answer.

Again, he voices an excellent principle, "Happy is the man whom God corrects" (v.17). But Job did not feel happy. Of course, God was only beginning His correcting work with Job, and Job did not discern it. Eliphaz could tell him, "Therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty, for He bruises, but He binds up; He wounds, but His hands make whole. He shall deliver you in six troubles, yes, in seven no evil shall touch you" (vv.17-19). If Eliphaz had spoken this to Job in a kind and encouraging way, it may have helped Job, but he was blaming Job for not having gained such blessing by confessing he was guilty of secret sin.

In verses 20 to 27 Eliphaz describes the many blessings that would be Job's if he took the advice of Eliphaz. Actually, these blessings were eventually given to Job after God spoke to him in Chapters 38-41, and Job was broken down to judge the pride of his own sinful nature, but Eliphaz had not discerned what Job really needed, the same need that Eliphaz himself had. Perhaps Eliphaz learned this in some measure also after God spoke to him (Ch.42:7-9). But in verse 27 of chapter 5, he confidently told Job, "Behold, this we have searched out; it is true. Hear it, and know for yourself." Again, it is his own observation that he depends on, but he urges Job to hear it and know for himself. Can we so depend on another person's word as to know it is fact? No: we need more than another person's observation, we need the Word of God to be certain as to any serious matter.

CHAPTER 6

JOB'S REPLY TO ELIPHAZ (vv.1-30)

It is remarkable that Job, being in the painful condition he was, was still able to reply in such capable and stirring language to Eliphaz. He knew that Eliphaz had not shown any understanding of Job's predicament, and he again emphasised the unutterable pain and grief that had overtaken him. He knew Eliphaz had not weighed Job's grief accurately, or he would have had more compassion for the poor sufferer (vv.2-3). Job says, "Therefore my words have been rash," that is, he had spoken as one in deepest anguish, so that he had inferred that God was not just in allowing this suffering to one who was upright. Of course it is rash to say such a thing, but Job's friends should have realised that Job's condition was such that wrong words were virtually forced from his mouth. Could they not make some allowance for this?

He goes on to describe something of the awfulness of his grief, speaking of "the arrows of the Almighty" piercing him and God's terrors arrayed against him. "Does the wild donkey bray when it has grass," he asks. If his situation was favourable, would Job be crying out as he was? Why would he be like an ox lowing when it was satisfied? The ox will not do that. Where was the salt to give some savour to the things Job had to bear? What comfort could he get from having to virtually eat the slime of an egg? He was left with no desire for food, in fact considered food loathsome (v.7).

Again he expresses his desire for death, for which he had prayed before. He could not understand why God did not answer such a prayer, for he was sure death was preferable to the anguish he was suffering (vv.8-9). Yet he did not think of suicide being an option. He says he has not concealed the words of the Holy One. He had not been guilty of covering up anything that God has spoken (v.10): could God not then listen to Job's prayer for death?

He felt he had no strength to even hope for anything better on earth, and no prospect of anything better, for which his life should be prolonged (v.11). Was he as strong and hard as stone or bronze that he could bear all his affliction with no feeling? (v.12). He could not look within himself for any help, and soundness (even sound reasoning) was virtually impossible to him (v.13 - JND trans.).

In verse 14 Job rightly remonstrates to the effect that kindness ought to be shown to one who was afflicted, even if that one had gone so far as to "forsake the fear of the Almighty." Not that Job had done so, but Eliphaz suspected he was on the verge of this. But in contrast to showing sympathy for Job, he says, "My brothers have dealt deceitfully like a brook, like the streams of the brook

that pass away," that is, the streams in winter swollen by snow and ice, promising blessing and refreshment, is soon dried up, leaving nothing of blessing behind (vv.16-17). Travellers may come, expecting water, but are disappointed to find nothing and are confused. Job thus expressed his own confusion at the words of Eliphaz (vv.19-20).

Job asks, "Did I ever say, 'Bring something to me?'" (v.22). Job had not even asked his three friends to come, let alone asking them for some benefit from their hands. Why did they then accuse him when all he needed was a little sympathy?

If they had something profitable and true to teach him, Job would willingly hold his tongue and listen. If he had erred as they supposed, why did they not tell him in what way he had erred (v.24). Right words would have been forceful and effective, but their arguments proved nothing (v.25). They rebuked his words that issued from his desperation, with no consideration of the depth of his suffering (v.26). They sought to overwhelm the fatherless, which seems to infer that Job's father had died, so that he did not have a father to help him; and they were undermining their own friend, a heartless attitude in contrast to former friendship (v.27).

Then Job pleads with them to just look at him. Did they see deceit in his countenance? He insists, "I would never lie to your face;" yet they were certain he must be concealing sin in his life (v.28). "Yield now," he tells them, let them not be guilty of injustice in their attitude. "Yes, concede my righteousness still stands!" Had his character changed since they last saw him?

CHAPTER 7

DOES GOD NOT RECOMPENSE GOOD DEEDS? (vv.1-16)

Job's questions in verse 1 indicate why he was so distressed at God's dealings. No doubt too his friends would agree to his questions. "Is there not a time of hard service for man on earth? Are not his days also like the days of a hired man?" How many people are like Job in this matter. They consider their relationship to God as being like that of a hired man working for a righteous employer. If they do right, their recompense should be good: if they do wrong, they expect a painful recompense. But Job was suffering agonising pain. Was this the recompense for the good he had done? He had looked eagerly for his wages for doing good (v.2), and found himself enduring months of futility and wearisome nights, tossing to and fro in his bed, his flesh caked with worms and dust (vv.3-5).

Thus, Job was inferring that God was unfair in recompensing evil for good. Of course God is not unfair, and his friends, in trying to defend God's righteousness, were guilty of deciding that God was recompensing Job for his secretly doing evil. How sadly wrong in their thoughts were both Job and his friends! God was seeking to teach Job that his relationship to Him must not be that of one working for wages, but that of one whom God loved and who loved God, therefore doing good simply out of a heart of love, expecting no payment for it. Job did not at this time understand this, and neither did his friends.

In verse 6 to 10 then Job continues his description of the anguish that he endured, his days spent without hope, expecting to never see good again (vv.6-7). Thus to him his future appeared bleak and hopeless. How wrong he was! - for God had designed greater blessing for him in the future than he had ever known before; and in fact eternity has infinitely greater blessing yet. But in the meanwhile Job's feelings were those of defeat and misery, considering his life as a cloud that appears and vanishes away. Death would overtake him and he would never return to his house (vv.9-10). Actually, he desired to die: why then did he think so hopelessly as to the results of death? But our feelings often cause us to be inconsistent. Of course at that time he could not know the marvel of the death of Christ completely answering the many distressing questions that death poses. We who know Christ today have reason for deepest thanksgiving for the value of His sacrifice on Calvary and His resurrection from among the dead.

However, Job, basing his words on the feeling he has expressed, says he will not restrain his mouth, but will speak in the anguish of his spirit and complain in the bitterness of his soul (v.11). If we give way to our feelings, the effects will always be this way: we shall not be able to restrain our mouths. Sober wisdom and concern for the truth will teach us to restrain our words, but our feelings will lead us to express ourselves unadvisedly. "Am I a sea," Job asks, that is, a huge, uncontrolled creature, or simply a sea serpent, so bent on its own will that Job's friends think it necessary to impose their authority upon him (v.12).

When he looked for comfort in lying down in his bed, then he says they "scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions" (vv.23-24). He refers to the vision Eliphaz claimed to have had, and which Job considered to be, not for his comfort, but to frighten him, and this moved him all the more to choose to die, so that he declares bitterly, "I loathe my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone, for my days are but a breath" (v.16). We can understand that Job would prefer to be left alone rather than to have the cold criticism of his friends.

JOB SPEAKING DIRECTLY TO GOD (vv.17-21)

Though answering Eliphaz, Job now addresses God directly, and in the same complaining way. "What is man?" he asks, that God should exalt him to a place where he is subjected to many direct inflictions that he considers sent by God Himself. Was Job so important that God should spend such time in dealing so hardly with him, testing him every moment? (vv.17-18). The actual answer to this is, "Yes." God considers every believer important enough for God to spend time in putting him through serious trials of faith. "How long?" (v.19). It seemed too long to Job, but God knows just the length of time that is necessary to accomplish His own ends in every case.

"Will you not look away from me and let me alone till I swallow down my saliva?" He realised that God was actually putting the pressure on him, and pleaded for relief from this. Supposing it true that he had sinned, yet what harm had this done to God whom he calls the Observer of men?" (v.20). Was God observing merely with a cold vindictive attitude, making Job a target for His temper - so that Job became a burden to himself? If Job had sinned in whatever minor measure, why would God not pardon this and take away his iniquity? (v.21). He knew he had not willingly rebelled against God in any way, and could not understand why God would not pardon any minor infractions. Now all he could do was lie down in the dust, so humiliated that God would not even be able to find him! - he would "no longer be." Of course Job's words are ill-considered, the expressions of a tortured mind. Yet it is as well that what is in the heart comes out.

CHAPTER 8

BILDAD'S CRUEL RESPONSE (vv.1-22)

Bildad's response to Job was much more brief than that of Eliphaz, but following along the same line. He did not begin in the conciliatory way that Eliphaz did, however, not even attempting to show any understanding of Job's feelings. Rather, he spoke as one exasperated, immediately accusing Job of allowing words to issue from his mouth that were only "a strong wind" (v.2). "Does God subvert judgment? Or does the Almighty pervert justice?" he asks (v.3). He was ignorant of how God was dealing with Job, but was sure God was punishing him righteously, though he had no knowledge of any actual evil on Job's part.

Then he makes a cruel thrust at Job by suggesting that Job's sons had died because they had sinned against God, so that God coldly cast them away for their transgressions (v.4). This was not true, but what was Job to answer? Thus, Bildad condemned Job's dead sons, then proceeded to attack Job himself, telling

him that if he would earnestly seek God in supplication and if he were pure and upright, then God would surely immediately awake for him and turn his misery into prosperity (vv.5-6). Of course in this he implied that Job had not been pure and upright and had not before earnestly sought God. But now, if he would do as Bildad advised, Job's end would increase abundantly, though his beginning was small (v.7).

Eliphaz had appealed to his own observation in supposing that Job was guilty of some secret sin (ch.4:8), but his observation settled nothing. Now Bildad appealed to tradition, "Inquire, please, of the former age, and consider things discovered by their fathers; for we were born yesterday, and know nothing, because our days on earth are a shadow. Will they not teach you and tell you and utter words from their heart?" (vv.8-10). Actually, in this Bildad contradicted what Eliphaz had said, for if Eliphaz had only been born "yesterday", what value was his observation? But Bildad's appeal to tradition was just as empty as the appeal of Eliphaz to observation, for Bildad came to the wrong conclusion also.

Yet Bildad had much to say that was right and good. The papyrus will not grow without a marsh, nor the reeds without water (v.11). There is always a reason for things developing, but Bildad did not interpret that reason accurately in Job's case. Also he says that a reed may wither while yet green, and he uses this as a simile for those who forget God (vv.11-12). True enough, but he was suggesting wrongly that Job had forgotten God, and the fact that Job's hope seemed to be perishing indicated that he must be a hypocrite (v.13). It is certainly true that the hypocrite's hope shall perish, but to apply this to Job was totally unfair.

Bildad saw that Job's confidence had been shaken, and considered his confidence was "cut off," as though he had been trusting a spider's web (v.14). He further says, "He leans on his house, but it does not stand" (v.15). Of course he is thinking of the fact that Job had depended on the stability of his house, but it had collapsed: all his family was gone.

In verses 16 and 17 he speaks of the hypocrite at first growing green in the sun, his branches spreading out, his roots wrapped around the rock heap, seemingly prospering well. But he may be destroyed from his place, with his place denying that it had ever seen him (v.18), that is, with no evidence that he had ever been prosperous. This description may be true indeed of the hypocrite in his eventual exposure and humiliation, but Bildad hinted that since Job had suffered things similar to the destruction he speaks of, therefore Job must be a hypocrite! But Bildad did not yet know the end of the story, and his assumptions were ill-considered and false.

"Behold, this is the joy of his way" (v.19), that is, the joy of the hypocrite is only brief and ends abruptly. "And out of the earth others will grow." The hypocrites will be forgotten, for others will be born to take their place. In contrast to this, "God will not cast away the blameless, "while He will not uphold evil doers (v.20). If Job were blameless, God would fill Job's mouth with laughing and his lips with rejoicing (v.21). No doubt Bildad was implying that Job could even yet find such blessing if he would return to living a blameless life. Then also, even those who hated Job would be clothed with shame, and the dwelling place of the wicked would be reduced to nothing (v.20). He did not mean to say that Job was wicked, but that the wicked who opposed Job would then be subdued.

If we consult the psalms of David, we shall find that David had a far better understanding of God's ways than either Eliphaz or Bildad expressed, and far better also than Job understood when passing through his dreadful ordeal. Psalm 11:4-5 tells us, "The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. The Lord tests the righteous." Faith recognises that the Lord is high above us, His wisdom infinitely greater than we realise. And from His place of highest authority, He tests the children of men. This is through adversity and trouble. No doubt He tests all men, but when some fail the test they are virtually discarded. What then? Then "the Lord tests the righteous." He gives them additional trouble to test them thoroughly. Job only learned this later.

CHAPTER 9

HOW CAN MAN BE JUST BEFORE GOD? (vv.1-13)

Job's reply to Bildad occupies two chapters, 35 verses longer than Bildad's arguments had taken. But Job acknowledged, "Truly, I know it is so," that is, he knew that what Bildad said of the end of the hypocrite was true, not the way in which Bildad inferred that Job might be a hypocrite. Then he asks a question of deepest significance, "But how can a man be righteous before God?" (v.2). Comparatively speaking, Job knew that he had been righteous before men, and God Himself had confirmed this in speaking to Satan (ch.1:8). But only the New Testament answers Job's question satisfactorily. It , is said of believers, "you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God - and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor.1:30). The work of Christ in His sacrifice on Calvary has accomplished a righteous basis for our eternal salvation, so that by faith in Christ we are counted righteous before God. Of course Job could not understand this at the time, for Christ had not yet died for us.

But Job acknowledges in verse 3 that even if he wished to argue his case with God, the odds against him were at least 1000 to one! There was evidence enough that God was wise in heart and mighty in strength. If one hardened

himself against God he would certainly not prosper. God could remove mountains by an earthquake, shaking the earth and causing its most stable influences to tremble. Also, high above the earth, He could command the sun not to rise, that is, so far as our vision is concerned. Of course He does this by placing clouds in the sky, so that the stars too are sealed off from view. He "alone spreads out the heavens, and treads on the waves of the sea." Whether the earth or sky or sea, He is in perfect control. There is a precious New Testament confirmation of His control of the sea, when "Jesus went to them, walking on the sea" (Mt.14:25), a clear proof that Jesus is God.

"He made the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades and the chambers of the south" (v.9). All the constellations of the stars are His workmanship. Notice, at this early date these astronomical facts were known. Job could speak knowledgeably of the greatness of God just as effectively, if not much more so, than Bildad. As he says, God "does great things past finding out, yes, wonders without number" (v.10). In fact, God's movements are such that Job could not see Him in action, though God can accomplish what no one can hinder (vv.11-12). He will not withdraw His anger from anything contrary to Him, and those who identify themselves with the proud will be prostrated under His feet.

JOB FINDS HE CANNOT DEFEND HIMSELF (vv.14-20)

What words does Job have with which to answer God? He feels unable to choose words that might have any effect. However righteous he may be, he felt hopelessly unable to make any impression on God by his speaking. He feels he could only beg for mercy from Him whom he calls, "my Judge," but even then he doubted that God would listen to his voice (vv.15-16). For instead of God listening, Job saw Him as crushing him with a tempest and multiplying Job's wounds without any actual cause (v.17). This seemed so incessant that Job felt God was not giving him time to even catch his breath, so that he was filled with bitterness.

If Job thought of strength (of which he had none), it was borne upon him that God is strong; and if of justice, of course God has both strength and justice on His side, but Job felt he was not even allowed a day in court to plead his cause. In fact, if he were given this privilege, he felt that though he was righteous, just opening his mouth would prove his undoing: even though blameless, his mouth would prove him perverse! (v.20). What does he mean? Is he not saying, in effect, that no matter how blameless he is, just his speaking proves to his friends that he must be dishonest and perverse?

THE BLAMELESS SUFFER LIKE THE WICKED (vv.21-24)

Job insists that he is blameless (v.21), yet in spite of this he was brought down to despise his life (v.21). He was, put on the same level as a wicked man: "it is all one thing," that is, the righteous and the wicked were lumped together in the way God dealt with them. "Therefore I say, He also destroys the blameless and the wicked" (v.22). It is true that this appears to be the case more often than not in our present life. How different however in the long run!

But Job goes too far in verse 23, "If the scourge slays suddenly, He laughs at the plight of the innocent." Job felt that God was practically laughing at Job's distress, as though it was no matter for Job to complain about at all. Thus Job felt utterly in the minority, for the earth seemed to be given into the hand of the wicked, with God covering the faces of its judges, since judges were unreliable men. If God was not in control of these things, who else could possibly be in control, he argues (v.24). When we see everything on earth in confusion, it seems to many people that there is no God in control of things at all. In all of these things, if we depend on our own understanding, we shall be left in utter confusion; and thus Job needed the verse that was written much later in history, "Trust in the Lord with all, your heart, and lean not on your own understanding" (Prov.3:5).

PURITY IMPOSSIBLE AND NO MEDIATOR (vv.25-35)

Job felt his days swiftly passing with nothing accomplished: "they flee away, they see no good" (v.25). Could he force himself to put off his sad face and wear a smile? How could he do this when his painful sufferings left him in fear? He feels that God does not hold him innocent or he would not be suffering as he was (v.28). Why did he labour to do what was good if this only led to his being condemned? If he had done his best to wash himself with snow water and cleanse his hands with soap, this energy was proven worthless, for God plunged him into a pit of mud, so that his own clothes would be insulted if he put them on (vv.30-31). What value was there therefore in his labouring to maintain purity?

Where could Job turn in such a case? For, as he says, God "is not a man as I am." that is, God is so much higher than Job that he could not expect God to come down to his level, as in a law court, so that there could be an understanding between them (v.32). "Nor is there any mediator between us, who may lay his hand on us both (v.33). Thus Job recognised the need of a mediator between God and men, and this verse surely anticipates the coming of the Lord Jesus as seen in the New Testament, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim.2:5). The Word of God insists that Christ is "The Man," who can lay His hand upon men, and being also

"God manifest in flesh" He can lay His hand upon God. Job did not know this, but later on when the young man Elihu spoke (ch.32-37), his words were much like a mediator, for he is a type of Christ.

Meanwhile, however, Job pleaded for God to withdraw His rod of correction from him, for he felt his dread of God to be terrifying. If God would only do this, Job might not be afraid to speak to Him, but as he says, "it is not so with me" (vv.14-15).

CHAPTER 10

AN ATTEMPT TO REASON WITH GOD (vv.1-22)

Since there was no mediator, Job in this chapter (from verse 2 on) directs all of his words directly to God, reasoning with Him as regards why God should deal with him in the way He was doing. He begins his complaint by repeating that his soul loathes his life, therefore he would allow himself to give free course to his bitter complaint by directly addressing God, pleading with Him, "Do not condemn me." God had certainly not condemned him, though he felt as though this was true because of his sufferings. "Show me why You contend with me" (v.2). In one respect it was true that God was contending with Job, and Job did not learn why until the last chapter of this book. He required this painful experience to learn that his own nature was sinful and to learn the pure grace and goodness of the Lord Himself.

"Does it seem good to You that You should oppress, that You should despise the work of Your hands, and smile on the counsel of the wicked?" (v.3). It is true that Job was the work of God's hands, for his own nature, as being born of God, was certainly God's workmanship. But it was not true that God was despising His own work, though Job felt that way, and specially so when he saw that wicked men appeared to prosper some of the time, but certainly all the wicked do not prosper all the time.

Do You have eyes of flesh? or do You see as man sees?" Job asks the Lord (v.4). Was God coming down to the level of a mortal man, that He should occupy Himself with searching out what might be iniquity in Job, as his three friends were doing, although, as Job says, God knew that Job was not wicked (vv.5-7). The friends might suppose that Job was guilty of hidden wickedness, but God knew this was not true. Still, God's hand was heavy on Job, and no one could deliver Job from that hand. Actually, God's hand was accomplishing blessing for Job that he did not then understand, so it was good for Job to be kept in God's hand, even when he felt it to be hard. "Your hands have made me and fashioned me, an intricate unity" (v.8). This was true of Job physically and

true also spiritually. All the various members of the body are marvellous in their individual functions and marvellous in their functioning unitedly. It might have helped Job to consider this more thoroughly, for none of us can understand how the eye, the ear, the tongue, the brain, the heart are able to function in the amazing way they do, and how all can act in perfect unison with one another. For this is God's work, much beyond our understanding. We should therefore expect God to do things in connection with us that are also higher than we can understand. If Job would just have patience in trusting God; then God would eventually make matters clearer to him. Complaining would accomplish nothing, yet Job complains that God now, after having wrought so marvellously in making him, is seeking to destroy him. Did he have to tell God to remember that He had made Job like clay? (v.9). But he felt he was being turned into dust again, the moisture gone out of the clay. In the past he recognised that God had spent time on him to pour him out like milk and curdle him like cheese, clothe his body with skin and flesh and join it together with bones and sinews (v.11), given life to that body and showing gracious favour to Job, caring too for more than his body, but preserving his spirit (v.12).

Since God had shown Himself most kind and considerate of Job in the past, Job could not understand why God could now be acting inconsistently with His previous dealings with him. "These things You have hidden in Your heart," he says (v.13). However, since this was true, God must have a good reason for hiding His counsels, and Job ought to have realised that God would reveal His mind in His own time.

On the one hand, Job knew that if he sinned God would mark this and not acquit him, for at that time Job did not know "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," but for sin he could only expect "woe." On the other hand, even if he was righteous (as he considered himself to be), he could not lift up his head, for he was in a state of misery and confusion, full of disgrace (vv.14-15).

His head had been exalted, but now he feels that God is hunting him like a fierce lion, showing Himself so awesome as to inspire fear in the poor man's heart (v.16). Also God had arrayed witnesses against him in the persons of his three friends, thus increasing His indignation against Job (v.17). He felt himself continually changing from one evil to another as though his own soul was the area of warfare.

If thus Job was living only for trouble, he considered, why then had God allowed him to be born? How much better he thought it would have been if only he had died before birth, so that he not be seen on earth, but rather carried from the womb to the grave (vv.18-19). His days were few enough without having troubles multiplied. So he tells God to "cease," that is, to leave him alone (v.20).

Did he not stop to think this was an insolent way to speak to his Maker? But he was too distressed to think soberly.

Should he not have a little comfort before he went to the place from which he would not return, the land of darkness and the shadow of death, where even the light is like darkness? (vv.21-22). Little did he realise that God would give him more than a little comfort in this present world, and that he would go eventually to a land of pure light and unspeakable joy. For he did not have the great revelation that believers have today, of the matchless grace of the Lord Jesus for every present need and the eternal glory of His presence into which every believer will enter in the future.

CHAPTER 11

ZOPHAR'S CRUEL ACCUSATION (vv.1-6)

Zophar was likely the youngest of the three men, and what he lacks in maturity he makes up for in bitter accusation against Job. He did not have such restraint as Eliphaz, nor such ability for argument as Bildad, but he does not restrain his bad temper. His appeal was not to his observation (as was that of Eliphaz), nor to the traditions such as Bildad had learned, but rather to his own intuition. He considered he instinctively knew the answer to Job's dilemma, and thought that Job needed only to learn "the secrets of wisdom" (v.6) as Zophar discerned them. He was evidently the most arrogant of all three friends of Job, the most self-confident.

He immediately attacks Job for his "multitude of words." Those words were too much for him to answer, so he resorts to the subterfuge of accusing Job of being merely "full of talk," and "empty talk" at that (v.2). He did not stop to consider that Job's words had been directed to God, not to him, but seems to think that he can answer satisfactorily for God! He was going to show Job that if Job could talk, he could talk too: he would not hold his peace. He accused Job of mocking, which was not true: Job was too intensely distressed to mock, but Zophar thought he needed to be reproved (v.3). Since Job had indicated his doctrine was pure and his conduct clean, Zophar was actually accusing God of being remiss in not speaking out against Job! (v.4), so that Zophar does what he thinks God ought to have done! He knew Job had criticised God, but now he was doing the same without realising it! He had found the secrets of wisdom (or he just knew these secrets by intuition), and he wished God would show such secrets to Job! These secrets were double what men generally realised, but Zophar knew them! (vv.5-6). Zophar even knew that God was punishing Job less than his iniquity deserved! Who told this to Zophar? Only his own superior intellect.

ZOPHAR AFFIRMS GOD'S INSCRUTABLE GLORY (vv.7-12)

Following his unfair accusations against Job, Zophar now tells Job in effect that he is unable to discern the deep things of God. Certainly it was true that Job could not search out the depths of God's wisdom, or "find out the limits of the Almighty." Did Zophar think God has any limits? He is infinite, not limited in any way. Zophar applied his words only to Job, but they were just as applicable to Zophar too! But he thought himself so wise that he did not need to learn, as Job did. God's thoughts are higher than the heaven, deeper than Sheol (v.8). No one can know them unless God reveals them. Their height and depth are first mentioned, then their length and breadth (v.9). These things are all mentioned in Ephesians 3:18, as matters now revealed in Christ, yet still "passing knowledge," for indeed the actual glory of Christ is infinitely beyond our understanding, though revealed to us in a very real and wonderful way by the Spirit of God. We do know Him, yet at the same time realise how little we know Him.

Zophar continues to speak in verse 10, "If He pass by, and shut up, and call to judgment, who can hinder him" (JND). This may well be considered. No one can thwart the judgment of God when it comes. Of course Zophar, in speaking thus, considered that God was judging Job, which was not the case. "For He knows deceitful men; He sees wickedness also. Will He not then consider it?" (v.11). Thus Zophar implied that Job was both deceitful and wicked, and that the proof of this was present in that God had considered Job's state and was judging him for it.

"Yet a senseless man will make bold, though man be born [like] the foal of wild ass" (v.12 - JND). It is true that senseless men will boldly assert themselves, though their very nature is that of such rebellion that is evident in a wild donkey's colt. But Zophar did not mean that as a general observation; rather he considered Job as a senseless man acting stubbornly, and not really recognising the greatness of the glory of God.

ZOPHAR'S ADVICE TO JOB (vv.13-20)

Since Zophar thinks that he has established the proof of Job's guilt and has shown Job something of the greatness of God, then he proceeds to urge Job to change his ways. He does not say in what Job has been guilty, but is sure he must be guilty of something. "If you would prepare your heart, and stretch out your hands toward Him; if iniquity were in your hand, and you put it far away, and would not let wickedness dwell in your tents; then surely you could lift up your face without spot; yes, you could be steadfast, and not fear; because you would forget your misery, and remember it as waters that have passed away, and your life would be brighter than noonday" (vv.13-17). Zophar thought he was

giving Job the remedy for his depressed condition, but his diagnosis was totally wrong and his remedy was therefore not what Job needed.

Yet he is sure that if Job would simply take his advice, the results would be of great blessing to Job. He would be secure and take rest in safety, he would lie down without fear, and many would court his favour (vv.18-19). Before Job's deep trial, many indeed had sought Job's favour, and Zophar thought that since this was not true now, the only reason could be Job's falling into sin. In fact, he implies this in adding, "But the eyes of the wicked will fail, and they shall not escape, and their hope - loss of life!" (v.20). He is warning Job that if he does not take Zophar's advice he will not escape, but end in dreadful judgment.

CHAPTER 12

JOB EMPHASISES GOD'S GREATNESS AND WISDOM (vv.1-25)

Job's reply to Zophar was understandably sarcastic, "No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you!" (v.2). Zophar had implied that he had intuitive wisdom such as Job lacked, and Job rightly reproved him in saying, "But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you" (v.3). In fact, Zophar had said only what was common knowledge: everyone knew these things.

Job felt the pathos of being mocked by his friends, ridiculed, though just and blameless (v.4). He had been a lamp, giving light, but now was despised in the thoughts of these friends who were comfortably at ease, who were ready to put down those whose feet slip. He even suggests that his friends were acting like robbers who were prospering, for they were stealing away his integrity and actually provoking God while pretending to speak on God's behalf. Job was puzzled that his friends could be so secure, resting in the blessing God had provided them, while speaking falsely for God! (vv.5-6). Why did they prosper while he suffered? He proceeds then, in verse 7, to show far more than Zophar did, the greatness and wisdom of God. He appeals to creation, the beasts, the birds, the earth, the fish as witnesses of the great variety of actions of power and greatness on the part of the Creator. "The hand of the Lord has done this" (v.9).

In that hand of power is the life of every living thing, Job affirms, and the breath of all mankind, - not only his own breath, but that of his three friends also. He would not let them think of themselves as merely detached onlookers, who could judge matters without being judged themselves. With his ears he tested their words, and he tasted what was fed to him, to discover whether it was palatable or not (vv.10-11). Thus, he sets Zophar's professed wisdom aside by

telling him that "wisdom is with aged men, and with length of days, understanding" (v.12).

Speaking of wisdom, however, brings Job face to face with God, who is infinite in wisdom and strength, He has counsel and understanding beyond all that is human. "If He breaks a thing down, it cannot be rebuilt" (v.14). In fact Job had been broken down, but he did not realise that the One who broke him down could also rebuild him, though Job could not do it. If God imprisons one, man cannot release him, though God can do so. God could use waters also as He saw fit. If He withheld the water the earth would dry up: if He sent a torrent of water this could cause an overwhelming flood (v.15). These two extremes have often followed one another and men are helpless, though God does not explain why He does this.

There are various things of which Job speaks that he gives God credit for, without realising their significance as regards his own case. God had strength and prudence; the deceived and the deceiver were both under His control (v.16), "He leads counsellors away plundered, and makes fools of the judges," that is, He deprives counsellors of the value of their counsel: thus man's wisdom is brought to nothing, and the judges become foolish: man's authority becomes as useless as his wisdom. Those who have been considered dependable are deprived of speech, the ability to be of help to others, and even elders who have been recognised for their experience will find their discernment taken away (vv.17-20).

"He pours contempt on princes, and disdains the mighty" (v.21). To princes (those in the place of dignity) God sees fit to show contempt, so contrary to what they might expect. The powerful He disarms, taking their power from them. If Job had taken time to consider the significance of these things, he might not have sunk so low in his miserable state. He sees the facts, but fails to apply their lessons in his own case. He says of God, "He uncovers deep things out of darkness, and brings the shadow of death to light" (v.22). Actually, Job was experiencing the pangs of darkness: he himself could not uncover deep things from the darkness, nor bring light from the shadow of death, but he realised God can do this. Could He not do it in Job's case? Yes indeed, and He did so before long.

God could and did make nations great, and then as He saw fit, destroy them. He could enlarge the nations and guide them too, but then take away the understanding of the chiefs of the people, to reduce the nation to a wandering wilderness path, to grope in the dark without light, made to stagger like a drunkard (vv.23-25). Thus the nations are an object lesson for all mankind. God

blesses them and they become proud of themselves, therefore they require the humbling dealings of God.

CHAPTER 13

JOB DECLARES HIMSELF FULLY EQUAL TO HIS FRIENDS (vv.1-12)

Job has spoken at length of God's wisdom and power, now he tells Zophar that his eye has seen all this, his ear has heard it and understood it. What Zophar knew Job knew also: he was not inferior to his critics (vv.1-2). In fact, what Job has said proves him more knowledgeable than they, so his words in verse 2 are an understatement.

In verse 3 he infers that it was no use talking to them: he wanted to speak to the Almighty, to reason with God, who at least would not be a forger of lies, as they were. They were "worthless physicians," he said, and would be wise if they kept silent (vv.4-5). He was seeking to reason and to plead with them, but they were not listening, and instead were speaking wickedly on God's behalf, using deceit in claiming to speak for God. Job knew that God was fully aware that the charges of his friends were not true, so God was certainly not backing them up. Job knew that God was not deceitful, as his friends were proving to be, and when the time came, God would search them out and would surely rebuke them. Of course Job was wondering why God did not intervene immediately, but he asks them a pointed question, "Will not His excellence make you afraid, and the dread of Him fall upon you?" (v.11). Men should deeply fear to misrepresent God whose glory is so high above the heavens. Therefore Job likens their arguments to ashes and to clay (v.12).

JOB PLEADS FOR A LISTENING AUDIENCE (vv.13-19)

Having exposed his friends' ignorance, Job asks them to keep quiet and listen to him. Actually, he could not give them the answer to the many questions that troubled him, but he could show them that their answers were empty and wrong. At least, he wants time to speak, then "let come on me what may" (v.13). Perhaps he had the faint hope that it might be so. He asks them, "Why do I take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in my hands?" (v.14). Did his friends consider why he would so expose himself to their ridicule and criticism? Was there not a reason for this? In fact, he declares positively that though God would slay him, yet he would trust Him. Did his trust in God indicate that he was guilty of hidden sin? No! he says, I will defend my own ways, before Him" (v.15).

Would God desert him? No! God would be his salvation. He was fully confident of this, though appearances did not persuade his friends, it was true. If one by sinning was turning away from, God, he would not have such confidence in God

as Job had, "for a hypocrite could not come before Him" (v.16). Therefore Job urges his friends (or critics) to listen carefully to what he says. He had not been haphazard in preparing his case for judgment, but was fully certain his case deserved careful consideration, for he says, "I know I shall be vindicated" (v.18). Doubtless it was true he would be vindicated in the eyes of men eventually, but in the eyes of God it is a different matter, as Job acknowledges in chapter 42:5-6, when his case was fully considered before God. Meanwhile he questions who could rightly contend with him, for his friends' contentions were empty. He felt it needful to defend himself - or perish (v.19). How different were his words when God spoke directly to him: "I lay my hand over my mouth" (ch.40:4), that is, he held his tongue.

A PRAYER OF DESPERATION (vv.20-27)

After answering his friends' accusations, Job resorts again to prayer. Was this not because he could expect no understanding from his friends? Where could he find help but in God?

He asks, "Only two things do not do to me" (v.20). If so, then Job would not try to hide from God. First, "Withdraw your hand far from me," that is, do not continue this trying affliction that Job felt he could not stand; and secondly, "let not the dread of You make me afraid" (v.21). He did not want to be terrified by the contemplation of the glory of God.

Was there not a possibility of some communication with God? Either let God call him and let Job answer, or let Job speak and God respond to him (v.22). He asks God, "How many are my iniquities and sins?" His friends had accused him of sinning, but God knew just how many were his sins. Of course it was not because of Job's sins that he was afflicted, but neither he nor his friends could think of any other reason for it. Was there some hidden guilt that Job was not aware of? Then let God reveal this to Job.

The fact that God did not respond seemed to Job that God considered Job to be His enemy (v.24). He compared himself to a leaf or to dry stubble, not worth any attention. Why would God frighten an object so insignificant? He felt that God was writing bitter things against Him - not literally, but at least in effect, and that he was bringing up the sins of Job's youth, for his more recent sins would not be as flagrant as those of his youth (v.26). Verse 27 intimates that God was confining Job to painful limitations. Verse 28 is true concerning all mankind, but Job was thinking of himself as in a state of decay and complaining about it. But sin is inherent in our nature received from Adam, and we cannot escape the resulting decay, which ends in death.

CHAPTER 14

MAN'S DECAY AND DEATH (vv.1-12)

What Job had said in chapter 3:28 he expands upon in these verses, giving a vivid description of the evanescent character of man's life on earth. This is generally true of all mankind, though men do everything in their power to alleviate this condition. "Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble" (v.1) Though Job himself lived 140 years after his bitter experience, yet when it was finished, it was only "few days." Like a flower, man comes forth and fades away. Like a shadow he does not continue (v.2). In view of this brevity of life, Job wondered why God troubles Himself to bring him to judgment, as he thought God was doing.

"Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one! This is impossible for any human being. Yet God is able to purify man's hearts, cleansing them through the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Jn.1:7), by faith (Rom.3:25). But this is found only in the New Testament, so Job did not understand such a marvellous gospel.

He recognises that God has determined the length of a man's life, and man cannot overstep his limits. But why did Job not at this time fully submit to the superior work of God, and not chafe at the limits God had placed him under? (v.5). "Look away from him that he may rest," Job says. Did he mean he wanted God to relax the limits, so he could rest comfortably? For he was only like a hired man: could he not finish his day's work in peace?

In verses 7-10 Job contrasts himself to a tree, which can sprout again after being cut down. This is often seen, that a new tree begins to grow out of the stump of one cut down. Though the stump is dead, yet with moisture a new tree will sprout. "But man dies and is laid away Indeed he breathes his last and where is he?" (v.10). However, the fact is that, though man's body is totally decayed in the grave, yet the new sprouting of a tree is a comparison, not a contrast to the eventual "sprouting" of a new body from the old. Man's resurrection is longer delayed, but it is just as certain. In fact, Job knew this, as he declares in chapter 19:26, but in chapter 14 he is too concerned about the immediate future to take into proper consideration the distant future.

In verses 11-12 he likens man's death to water evaporating from the sea or a river becoming dried up. "So man lies down, and does not rise till the heavens are no more." This is an exaggeration because the time seemed so long to Job, as though death was the end of everything.

ANOTHER PLEA FOR DEATH (vv.13-17)

Though he has inferred that death is the end of everything, Job pleads with God that he might die, thinking that he might thus be hidden until God's anger had subsided. For he thought that his troubles stemmed from the wrath of God (v.13). In this he was totally mistaken. If only God would set a definite time where He might relax His trying dealings with Job, then Job would understand. But if he died, would he live again? (v.14). We have seen that he answered this himself in chapter 19:26-27, but his words show the state of confusion he was in, which caused him to often speak inconsistently.

He says, "All the days of my hard service I will wait till my change comes," that is, wait for death - but not wait patiently! Meanwhile God was numbering Job's steps, but Job did not want Him to watch over his sins, which he considered "sealed up in a bag," not apparent, only needing covering by God Himself, for he did rightly think God could do this.

JOB THINKS GOD PREVAILS AGAINST MAN (vv.18-22)

Not only does Job recognise that man dies, but in this life Job saw the evidence of God's power being used to break man down to the dust. Is this what God thinks of His creation? Does He take pleasure in demolishing the work of His hands? "As a mountain falls and crumbles away, and as a rock is moved from its place; as water wears away stones, and as torrents wash away the soil of the earth; so You destroy the hope of man." Why is God not content with letting man die, rather than to make him suffer before death?

Job sees only power on God's side, God prevailing against man without man having any chance of recovery: man passes on. God changes His countenance (from pleasant to depressing) and sends man away (v.20), left alone to wander in misery. Yet in reality God was dealing in pure love toward Job, not merely in power. Whether man's sons come to honour or whether they are brought low, the father is so reduced as not to perceive it (v.21). Of course, before this Job's sons had all been killed, but he thinks of this situation as a general truth, that man can find no pleasure in his family, no more than in himself. Rather, his flesh will be in pain and his soul will mourn (v.22). How painful and dismal is the picture he portrays!

CHAPTER 15

15-21. Second cycle of speeches

Ch. 15. Eliphaz' second speech

Ch. 16-17. Job's reply to Eliphaz

Ch. 18. Bildad's second speech

Ch. 19. Job's reply to Bildad

Ch. 20. Zophar's second speech

Ch. 21. Job's reply

ELIPHAZ CLAIMS JOB CONDEMNS HIMSELF (vv.1-6)

This response of Eliphaz lacks the measure of self-restraint he had shown in his first address. He had first at least spoken with a measure of consideration for Job, but now he directly accuses him of gross sin and hypocrisy. He says in effect, if Job considered himself wise, why did he speak with empty knowledge, his words like the east wind? Eliphaz does not directly answer what Job has said, but accuses him of unprofitable talk and speeches that can do no good (vv.2-3). He says, "You cast off fear, and restrain prayer before God." But Job's words showed very definite fear and he had actually prayed to God in the presence of his friends. What was Eliphaz talking about?

He tells Job that his own iniquity leads him to speak as he does and that Job chose cunningly devised words to cover up his sin (v.5). Plainly, Eliphaz was strongly condemning Job, but he says that was not condemning him, but that Job's own words condemned him. He does not tell Job what words actually condemned him, but used this sweeping accusation to nullify all that Job had said. Of course this was grossly unfair, but he smugly insists, "Your own lips testify against you" (v.6).

DID JOB THINK HIMSELF WISER THAN OTHERS? (vv.7-13)

In this accusation of Eliphaz, suggesting that Job inferred that he was wiser than all others, Eliphaz is again absolutely unfair. Zophar had told Job, "O that God would speak and open his lips against you, that He would show you the secrets of wisdom" (ch.11:5-6). He inferred that he knew the secrets of wisdom, and Job did not. Job had answered this, "No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you" and he had protested, not that he was wiser than his friends, but that "I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you" (ch.12:2-3).

Therefore it was dishonest of Eliphaz to ask him, "Are you the first man who was born? or were you made before the hills? Have you heard the counsel of God? Do you limit wisdom to yourself?" (vv.7-8). Job had asked his friends virtually the same question that Eliphaz asks in verse 9, "What do you know that we do not know? He had said, "What you know, I also know; I am not inferior to you" (ch.13:2), but Eliphaz accused him of claiming to be superior to them. Eliphaz ought to have reproved Zophar for assuming that he knew the secrets of

wisdom and that Job did not, but the arguments of Eliphaz only exposed his partiality.

He proceeds also to imply that he and his friends were actually wiser than Job, for he tells Job, "Both the grey-haired and the aged are among us, much older than your father" (v.10). He had appealed to tradition before: now he says that not only tradition, but those who originated tradition, were on the side of these three men!

What does Eliphaz mean by asking, "Are the consolations of God too small for you, and the word spoken gently with you?" (v.11). No doubt he meant that he and his friends had brought the consolations of God to Job, and Job did not appreciate such help. Also, he says that they had spoken the word gently to Job. Why did Job not respond to this gentleness? Of course Job did not think their words were gentle, nor did he consider that they were showing him "the consolations of God." No wonder Job said in chapter 16:2, "miserable comforters are you all!"

Eliphaz considered that Job's heart was carrying him away and he was turning his spirit against God (vv.12-13). Why? Because his spirit was turned against what his friends were saying, and Eliphaz thought they were speaking for God. He could strongly reprove Job for his letting such words as Job spoke ever come forth from his mouth. But Eliphaz did not stop to consider that he needed to restrain such words as came from his own mouth.

GOD'S HOLINESS IN CONTRAST TO MEN (vv.14-16)

There is excellent truth in these verses, if Eliphaz would apply it as positively to himself as to Job, but he wanted to convict Job by the truth he expressed rather than take it seriously to his own heart. In any absolute sense, no man is pure or righteous, as verse 14 implies. But Eliphaz wanted Job to therefore confess to sins that Job had not actually committed. Yet if we think of Job as compared to other men, God had said that Job was the most righteous man on earth.

Eliphaz continues, "If God puts no trust in His saints (evidently angels), and the heavens are not pure in His sight, how much less man, who is abominable and filthy, who drinks iniquity like water!" (vv.15-16). From God's viewpoint this too is true, but would Eliphaz have appreciated it if Job called him "abominable and filthy?" Thus Eliphaz was seeking to use a general truth to convict Job of worse guilt than was actually true of Job.

THE STUBBORNNESS OF WICKED MEN (vv.17-26)

Though Eliphaz had shown mankind generally to be "abominable and filthy," now he dwells on the character and actions of wicked men, so that he does make a distinction between the wicked and the righteous, but he wants to compare Job to the wicked man. "I will tell you, hear me," he says, implying that this was the instruction Job needed. For he was depending on what wise men had told, receiving it from their fathers, showing again that tradition was most important to Eliphaz. He says, "No alien passed among them," that is, that there were none to disagree with their conclusions.

Thus tradition said, "The wicked man writhes with pain all his days" (v.20). Of course Job was writhing with pain, so this was another cruel thrust at Job. "And the number of years is hidden from the oppressor." Did he mean that Job did not know for how many years he would writhe in pain because he was guilty of being an oppressor? "In prosperity the destroyer comes upon him" (v.21). It was when Job was enjoying prosperity that trouble came suddenly to him, therefore Eliphaz concluded that Job must be a wicked man, for he did not stop to consider that others beside wicked men had trouble too. And because Job had expressed himself as despairing of any hope of returning from the dark state into which he had come, Eliphaz took advantage of this to further convict Job (v.22).

He speaks of the wicked wandering in search of bread, that is, some return to a former state. "Trouble and anguish make him afraid" (v.24). Therefore since Job admitted he was afraid because of his great suffering, Eliphaz considered this another proof of Job's wickedness. "He stretches out his hand against God, and acts defiantly against the Almighty, running stubbornly against Him" (vv.25-26). These were things that Eliphaz saw in Job, so that he felt himself right in comparing Job to wicked men. Certainly in all this Eliphaz showed painful lack of discernment and unfeeling cruelty.

THE RECOMPENSE OF THE WICKED (vv.27-35)

But now Eliphaz proceeds to warn Job as to what the wicked can expect to reap as reward for their wickedness. Though he built himself up with great prosperity, he would dwell in desolate cities, in houses that were coming to ruin (vv.27-28). His riches would dissipate (v.29). Darkness would overcome him, fire would dry up his branches. As he had lived in futile pursuits, futility would be his reward (vv.30-31). This would be accomplished before he had time to enjoy life (v.32). He may have grapes on his vine, but not ripe, cast off before being of any use. Blossoms on his olive tree, showing promise of fruit, would also be cast off before fruit came. "The company of hypocrites will be barren, and fire will consume the tents of bribery" (v.34). Eliphaz had before implied that Job was a hypocrite (vv.5-6), now he suggests that Job might be guilty of

bribery too. At any rate, all that the wicked conceive is trouble, and this ends in futility (v.35). This is what he considered Job's end would be!

CHAPTER 16

JOB REPROVES THEIR HEARTLESSNESS (vv.1-5)

Eliphaz had claimed to be giving Job "the consolations of God," and this moves Job to reply bitterly, "Miserable comforters are you all!" (v.2). Instead of comfort, they had given heartless accusations, which Job terms "words of wind." He says that if they were in his place, he could heap up words against them in similar cruel accusation, but he would not do so: he would use his words to strengthen and encourage them in order to give them some relief. He longed for this himself, but they had nothing for him.

JOB FEELS GOD HAS MOVED MEN TO PERSECUTE HIM (vv.6-14)

Whether Job spoke or remained silent, he found no relief. He feels that God has worn him out by making all his company (his friends) desolate of any help, and thus Job was shrivelled up. In verse 9 it may be doubtful that he is referring directly to God, for in verse 10 he uses the plural "they" three times. But he evidently thought God was practically influencing others to tear Job in His wrath. Did he think God was responsible for the hatred of man? In fact, we know that God would not approve of such persecutions that Job lists in verses 9 and 10, but his friends were claiming to be speaking for God!

Because Job had found no help or encouragement from his three friends, but rather the opposite, he pathetically declares, "God has delivered me up to the ungodly, and turned me over to the hands of the wicked" (v.11). Just as Eliphaz had exaggerated Job's condition by calling him wicked, so Job exaggerates by referring to his friends as wicked. He felt that God was taking sides with the ungodly against him. A resisting attitude will always have wrong thoughts about God and His ways, whereas a submissive attitude will find its thoughts wonderfully corrected.

Still, it is commendable that Job recognised that in the final analysis he was dealing with God, so that he looks beyond his friends to see that God was behind all that was coming upon him. This shows he was a true believer, though he made deductions that were wrong, for he was virtually blaming God as though God was doing wrong. "I was at ease," he says, "but He has shattered me; He also takes me by the neck and shakes me to pieces. He has set me up for His target, His archers surround me. He pierces my heart and does not pity, He pours out my gall on the ground. He breaks me with wound upon wound; He runs at me like a warrior" (vv.12-14).

If Job had only realised that it was because of God's pure love to him that He allowed such things to try him, how different would his attitude have been! Eventually he was brought to such a conclusion, however, so that the end of the history is bright with God's praise and Job's great blessing.

JOB LOOKS TO HEAVEN FOR HELP (vv.15-22)

Job now draws attention to the extreme misery he was passing through, concerning which Zophar had callously said Job's suffering was less than he deserved. "I have sewn sackcloth over my skin, and laid my head in the dust, my face is flushed from weeping, and on my eyelids is the shadow of death" (vv.15-16). If he had been guilty of violence and hypocrisy, this would be understandable, but he insists that no violence was in his hands and his prayer was pure.

He calls to the earth not to cover his blood, that is, not to cover up the fact of his undeserved suffering; and not to let his cry have a resting place, apparently that his cry should be heard rather than silenced. For he had confidence that the witness of his innocence was in heaven, though his friends on earth had refused it and scorned him (vv.18-20).

"Oh that one might plead for a man with God, as a man pleads for his neighbour!" (v.21). We today know the wonderful answer to this in the New Testament. "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 Jn.2: 1). The Lord Jesus does indeed plead for us before the Father's face, a true and gracious Intercessor whose petitions the Father will never deny.

Even in Job's day, his faith could have anticipated this if only he had a submissive spirit. However, in a state of despondency he says, "For when a few years are finished I shall go the way of no return" (v.22). He therefore expected to live a few years more, but thought of those years only as continuing his present misery, and says nothing of the bright prospect of eternity, which at least today should be a matter deeply precious to a believing heart, - that is, eternal glory and eternal blessing with Christ. How marvellous is the advantage the children of God have today over those of Old Testament days!

CHAPTER 17

Job has much more to say than his friends had, and we may marvel at the detailed way in which he describes his present condition in contrast to what he had once enjoyed. "My spirit is broken, my days are extinguished, the grave is ready for me" (v.1). Was it true that mockers were with him? They might think they were comforters, but were they not mocking? (v.2).

Job considered himself so despised that no one would even shake hands with him, and he thought that God had hidden their heart from understanding (vv.3-4). In verse 5 he certainly was not accusing his friends of flattering him, but did he mean that he would not dare to flatter them?

But rather than being flattered by people, Job now thought that God had made him a byword of the people (v.6), one in whose face men would spit. If this was not literally true, it was true figuratively. His sorrow had affected his eyesight and he felt his bodily members were like shadows. (v.7). If men were upright they would be astonished at Job's sufferings, but his friends showed no such astonishment. In fact Job, knowing himself innocent of the charges against him, was stirred up against the hypocrisy of his friends, and Job would hold to his way in spite of the opposition. As he says, "he who has clean hands will be stronger and stronger" (v.9). This is true, but at the time did Job feel stronger and stronger? Thank God his experience would certainly end in his being strengthened.

In verse 10 Job pleads with his friends to come back again, that is, no doubt, to come back to a sensible position of actually being comforters, for he had found none of the three to be wise men. (v.11). It seemed to him his life was finished, and there was nothing to live for. In verse 12 it seems he refers to his friends as changing the night into day, that is, regarding Job's distressing night time experiences as light enough for them to understand that his troubles were because of his sin.

CHAPTER 18

BILDAD'S STRONG REPROOF (vv.1-3)

Bildad did not learn from Job's words to be a little more considerate than before, but shows only more strong opposition, reproving Job unjustly. He considered Job's words as being without understanding and advised him to "gain understanding" so that his friends would be more free to speak to him. He asks, "Why are we counted as beasts and regarded as stupid in your sight?" (v.3). No doubt if Bildad had not acted like a beast, Job would not have spoken to him as he did. Yet Job had not accused them of being stupid, but had rather protested that he was not inferior to them, and that he did not find a wise man among them (ch.12:2; 17:10). Why did Bildad not at least modify his unfair attitude?

BILDAD LIKENS JOB TO A WICKED MAN (vv.4-7)

Job had spoken of others making him suffer and God apparently doing so too. But Bildad tells him that he tears himself in his anger, in other words, that Job was causing himself all his trouble. Does Job expect the earth or the rocks to

yield to his will? This was an exaggeration of what Bildad thought he perceived in Job's attitude. In verse 5 he refers back to Job's claim that his friends were changing the night into day, saying the light is near in the face of darkness (ch.17:12). "The light of the wicked indeed goes out," Bildad says, implying that since Job had no clear light in the darkness of his experience, then Job must be wicked.

Therefore he enlarges on the condition of the wicked, words true enough, but not applicable to Job as though he were wicked. What light the wicked man has is only darkness, and God will see that his lamp is totally put out (v.6). His life will be shortened and his own counsel leads to his downfall (v.7). This graphic description of the expectation of the wicked is right and good, but is no help to Job.

THE WICKED, UNWATCHFUL, ARE SNARED (vv.8-11)

In these verses Bildad tells Job that the wicked, being unaware of danger because of ignorance, are easily snared by evil. The snare may be a noose hidden on the ground, perhaps covered by leaves, but drawn when one walks into it. Bildad thought that because Job had not expected the evil that came to him, therefore he had not watched against being snared, and had walked into the snare. Of course this was not the case with Job, though it is commonly true of the wicked.

RESULTING DISEASE AND DEATH (vv.12-15)

Bildad goes farther here to speak of the disease that overtakes the one who is snared. His words are really a description of what Job was suffering at the time, but he embellishes this with additional fearsome afflictions intended to frighten the poor sufferer. His strength is reduced to nothing and his destruction is imminent. Disease breaks out in patches of his skin, and "the king of terrors" (death) is set as the prospect before his eyes. Others who are not of his family will take over his dwelling, scattering brimstone on it, leaving it unfit for him. Everything Bildad said may not have been literally true of Job, but it was close enough that Job knew Bildad was thrusting at him.

ROOT AND BRANCH DRIED UP (vv.16-19)

Thus, disease will lead to complete stagnation, both root and branch dried up and the very memory of the person perishing from the earth. Nothing is left, no name among those who are renowned, but practically driven from light to darkness, chased out of the world with no children to carry on his name. How desolate a picture! It is true of the wicked, and since all Job's children had been killed, then Bildad used this as a cruel thrust at Job as evidence that he must be wicked. At the time of course Job had no children to carry on his name; but later

on he did have as many children as he had before! (Ch.42:13). Also Bildad intimated that Job would have no name among those who are renowned; but the name of Job has been one of remarkable renown for centuries since that time. As to his possessions too Job was given twice as much as he had before the dreadful experience he was given to bear (Ch.42: 10). Bildad did not consider the possibility of the whole picture changing completely, as did happen before too long.

THE END OF MAN'S DAY (vv.20-21).

Finally Bildad speaks of people both from the west and the east witnessing in astonished fear the bitter end of the wicked (v.20). He does not even think of a way out for Job, but places him alongside of the wicked who dwell in fear, as all the evidence shows. "This is the place of him who does not know God," he says. He ignores the fact that Job had spoken much of God and His ways, for he considered that Job's words have been hypocritical. When God eventually intervened in this matter, how totally astonished Bildad himself must have been, to witness in Job, not "the bitter end of the wicked," but the wonderful end of an honourable believer who had suffered for a while and who learned patience in his suffering. But that patience was not learned through the help of his friends, rather through the wise dealings of the Lord with him.

CHAPTER 19

JOB'S REPLY TO BILDAD (vv.1-6).

Though Job did not lose his temper at the unjust accusations of Bildad, he shows here that the reproaches of his friends have struck deeply into his soul. "How long will you torment my soul, and break me in pieces with words?" (v.2). He is appealing to the fact that the best he can say of their words is that they are unfair. Ten times they had reproached him. Should they not be ashamed that they had actually wronged him? They had accused him of evil without knowing anything on his part that was evil. If he had erred, therefore, his error was only known to himself. They were only making thrusts in the dark.

They pleaded the fact that Job was disgraced as evidence of guilt on his part, so that they felt themselves secure in taking an exalted position over him (v.5). But he insists that God has wronged him and virtually bound him in a net (v.6). This is strong language against God, but he felt that his troubles were not deserved, and since he had the same misconception as his friends that God meted out suffering according to man's measure of guilt, he concluded that in his case God had been unfair

JOB FEELS GOD IS AGAINST HIM (vv.7-11)

God does not deal with man on a legal basis, as men generally think; thus Job speaks of crying out of wrong and being ignored by God. Where was the justice in this? (v.7). Job felt so constricted as to be a virtual prisoner unable to find any way out, with darkness hedging him in (v.8). His prosperity and dignity had been stripped from him, and he says God has broken him down on every side, leaving him not even an avenue of hope (vv.9-10).

Thus, he considers he is the subject of God's bitter anger and that God counts him as His enemy (v.11). How totally wrong Job was in all this. But when one is bound up in "self" he will always think of God in this accusatory way. Yet in all the trouble Job was experiencing, God was acting toward him in genuine love and compassion. At the moment Job could not see this, as later he would.

PEOPLE ALSO AGAINST JOB (vv.12-20)

Since people generally live by a legal principle, it is understandable that they had the same attitude toward Job as did his friends. But Job counted them as God's troops come together, "building roads" against him. Of course Job's surmise was wrong. God did not move these people against him, though no doubt Satan did so. Job's brothers had removed themselves from him, and Job blamed God for this. His acquaintances, relatives and close friends had distanced themselves from him (vv.12-14). Even those living in his own house, including maid servants, acted toward him as though he had been a stranger, a foreigner not to be considered (v.15).

At least Job's three friends did sit with him, and listened to him, but his servants would not even answer when he called. His breath was offensive to his wife, which was no doubt literally true. His wife was evidently no help to him in his sufferings (vv.16-17). Also he says, "I am repulsive to the children of my own body Even young children despise me." Of course he was not speaking of his sons and daughters, who had before been taken in death, so it is likely his grandchildren of whom he speaks. We can understand what children's feelings would be in seeing him sitting in an ash heap covered with sore boils, yet Job felt the fact of their recoiling from him in contrast to their former respect for him. But if he arose, he said, they would speak against him. At least, however they felt, even young children should not be so callous as to speak against a sufferer.

"All my close friends abhor me, and those whom I love have turned against me." Certainly anyone who has experienced such rejection cannot but feel the pain of it, yet Job's friends seem not to have even considered how deeply Job must be affected. His body must have been emaciated - his bones clinging to his flesh -

and he feels he has barely escaped death, as by the skin of his teeth, - a metaphor indicating the finest margin.

JOB'S PLEA FOR PITY (vv.21-24)

If no one else will have pity on Job, at least he feels that his friends who have come to comfort him should manifest some measure of pity rather than of accusation. He pleads with them therefore, for as he says, "the hand of God has struck me." Should they add to his suffering, thinking it right to do so because God had made him suffer? He felt God was persecuting him, which was not true, but it was true that his friends were persecuting him, being not satisfied that his flesh had suffered enough.

At this point Job expresses his longing that his words were indelibly written (vv.23-24), for he was sure he was speaking truthfully. In fact, what he has said is inscribed in the Word of God for eternity, more lasting than if engraved in rock with an iron pen with lead inserted in the letters. Job however will not for eternity consider all those words as true, for after this he learned that God was indeed not a persecutor, but One who in everything sought the greatest good of his servant.

FAITH'S BEAUTIFUL TRIUMPH (vv.25-27)

In the midst of Job's deep depression it is wonderful to hear him speak so positively in these three verses, "I know that my Redeemer lives." Thus his faith is seen to surmount his feelings, which he had allowed to discourage him. Notice, he says "my Redeemer." The Lord would therefore certainly redeem him from all the adversities he was experiencing. How could he then have spoken so critically of the Lord before? But such is the inconsistency of our fleshly nature. Also, "He shall stand at last on the earth." Thus Job becomes a prophet, for this could have been revealed to him only by the Lord Himself. We know it is true because scripture subsequent to Job has revealed it, but it appears that God virtually put these words into Job's lips for his own encouragement. Of course it was true when the Lord Jesus came by way of the virgin Mary, and again it will be true when He returns in glory (Zech.14:4).

But more than this, Job says, "And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God" (v.26). How amazing it is that Job could say this. Only by divine revelation could he know this, for he recognised that though he was destroyed by death, yet in his flesh he would see God. This certainly means resurrection. Also, the only way he (or anyone) will see God is in the person of the Lord Jesus (Jn.1:18).

He adds, "Whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another" (v.27), that is, it would not be by proxy, but a personal, vital matter. No wonder he is moved to say, "How my heart yearns within me!" This should have been enough to lift him high above the trauma of his bitter experiences, and perhaps for the moment he was lifted up, but his history at this time was very generally a conflict between faith and feelings.

A CLOSING APPEAL (vv.28-25)

In verses 28 and 29 Job returns to admonish his friends, whom he considered were seeking means or words to persecute him, because they thought the root of Job's troubles was really in himself. But he tells them to be afraid in having such an attitude, afraid of a punishing sword. For God's wrath would bring such punishment, that they might know there is a judgment. Such words from Job ought to have made his friends to consider seriously at least whether or not they might be persuaded by them.

CHAPTER 20 - ZOPHAR EXPOUNDS ON THE WICKED MAN

THE WICKED MAN'S BRIEF TRIUMPH (vv.1-5)

Zophar does not even consider the possibility that Job is not wicked, but again strongly condemns the wicked, making it evident that he is really speaking of Job. He was evidently greatly stirred, not by the Spirit of God, but by his own misguided thoughts (v.2). Job had asked for some pity, but Zophar thinks he only deserves the opposite. He had heard Job's rebuke that was a reproach to Zophar, but makes it clear that he will accept no rebuke. He fights back with "the spirit of his understanding" (v.3), not by the Spirit of God.

Did Job not know that "he triumphing of the wicked is short?" (vv.4-5). Of course Job knew this, but Zophar was thinking of Job's earlier history as the triumphing of the wicked, now cut short by his adversity. His joy being cut short was proof to Zophar that Job was a hypocrite. However, was the triumphing of the wicked always as short as Zophar implied? No. Asaph speaks of this in Psalm 73 when he "saw the prosperity of the wicked" (v.3). They might go through life with no real adversity, but their triumph is cut short at least when they die, as Asaph learned in the sanctuary, as he says, "I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end" (Ps. 73:17).

THE WICKED SOON CUT OFF (vv.6-11)

"Though his haughtiness mounts up to the heavens, and his head reaches to the clouds, yet he will perish forever like his own refuse" (vv.6-7). These words were cruelly unfair to Job. While he was remiss in the way he spoke of God, yet Job's words cannot be rightly considered haughty. Zophar speaks as though Job's

haughtiness was excessively bad, and goes so far as to predict that Job would perish forever! Of course this was absolutely false as to Job, though it is true of the wicked.

The following verses (8-9) speak of people missing the wicked man, asking where he is, for as a dream he goes as quickly as he comes. Why "his children seek the favour of the poor" may not be too easily understood, and there is some question as to the translation, "his hands restore his wealth." But his bones that were once full of fruitful strength will be reduced to the dust of death (v.11).

POISONED WITH HIS OWN VENOM (vv.12-16)

Zophar is remarkably graphic, and correct, in describing the plight of the wicked man. This section shows that man's wickedness comes back upon himself. Evil may be sweet in his mouth, virtually hiding it under his tongue, willing to speak wickedness instead of judging it and forsaking it (vv.12-13). He keeps it in his mouth and soon swallows it, and his stomach turns sour (v.14). What he swallows becomes as cobra venom.

Zophar continues his graphic description of the wicked man, saying that he swallows down his criminally obtained riches, but vomits them up again (v.15). He is like a drunkard with delirium tremens. At first when he drinks, the pleasure of it deceives him, and his pleasure soon turns to bitterness. He has himself been guilty of sucking the poison of cobras, and the results of this can be only his own fault: he destroys himself (v.16).

NO REFUGE IN PAST PROSPERITY (vv.17-20)

Thus, the wicked will not see what he has in the past depended on, "the rivers flowing with honey and cream." That for which he laboured will not sustain him now (v.18), and from the proceeds of his past business he will get no resulting enjoyment. The reason for this Zophar considers to be that "he has oppressed and forsaken the poor, he has violently seized a house which he did not build" (v.19). Of course this may be true of some wicked men, but to charge Job with such crime was itself a repulsive crime.

"Because he knows no quietness in his heart, he will not save anything he desires." It is true that God will allow no quietness in the heart of a wicked man; but Job did not enjoy quietness in his heart because of his sufferings. Zophar knew this and supposed Job was therefore wicked. Would Job then save nothing he desired? Thus Zophar would discourage Job from ever expecting any good to come out of his afflictions. How little he knew the heart of God, who moved Paul at a later date to write, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17).

RETRIBUTION (vv.21-25)

Not only could a wicked man find his own wickedness recoiling on him, and find no help in his past experiences, but he could also expect harsh retribution from the hand of God. "Nothing is left for him to eat," Zophar says; his prosperity will not last, his self-sufficiency will only serve to mock him, and misery would come on him from every hand (vv.21-22). Though he intends to fill his stomach in self-satisfaction, God would cast on him the fury of His wrath and rain His anger on him while he is eating (v.23). Job felt that this was practically what God was doing to him, and Zophar seemed glad to "rub it in," to make Job all the more miserable. But this could not persuade Job that he was wicked, for he knew such accusations against him were false.

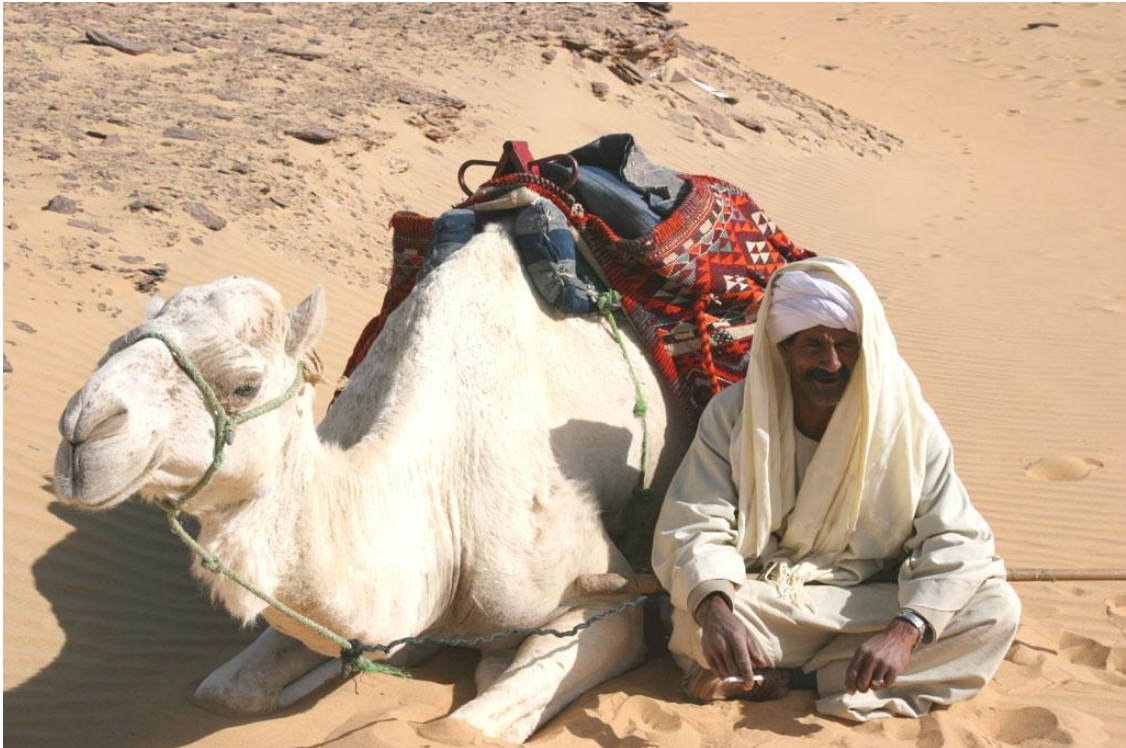
"He will flee from the iron weapon" (v.24). This may remind us of Joseph, who "was laid in irons" (Ps. 105:18), the iron speaking of hard, unyielding circumstances, that in Joseph's case found him calmly submissive, but caused Job to want to flee, as with most of us, we want to avoid the hardness of trials. One might ask, would Zophar feel submissive if an iron weapon threatened him? or would he want to flee from it? But he was not in the same predicament as Job, and could speak quite confidently about others. "A bronze bow will pierce him through," evidently speaking of the arrow from the bow. Thus he is pierced through with terror.

GOD'S WRATH WITH NO ALLEVIATION (vv.26-29)

This section emphasises more strongly Zophar's words of the previous section, declaring the total, unmitigated wrath of God toward a wicked man. "Total darkness is reserved for his treasures" (v.26). Actually total darkness will be the case for all who reject the grace of God in Christ Jesus, "the blackness of darkness forever" (Jude 13). But Job had said, "In my flesh I shall see God" (ch.19:26): he certainly did not expect the blackness of darkness forever. Nor would the fire of hell consume him, as the wicked will experience. It is true enough that the heavens would reveal the iniquity of the wicked, and even the earth would rise up against him. All that he has gained on earth will depart, nothing left to show for his life here, in the day of God's wrath (vv.27-28). Thus Zophar ends his discourse, "This is the portion from God for a wicked man, the heritage appointed to him by God" (v.29). There was a good measure of truth in what he said, but his inferring that Job was identified with such a class of evil-doers was not only unfair; it was inexcusably false.

From this time on Zophar had nothing more to say, though both Eliphaz and Bildad responded again to Job's strong protests, Eliphaz rather briefly, and Bildad much more briefly. Then the whole field was left to Job, whose closing arguments occupied nine chapters, and left his friends with nothing in the way of

response. Very likely Eliphaz was the eldest of these friends, and Zophar the youngest, for Eliphaz appears to have had more experience, and experience that should have given him more understanding of Job's actual condition and needs. Zophar however, as is often the case with young and inexperienced men, assumed that he had more discernment than his elders, particularly Job, who was no doubt much older than he, but whom he did not hesitate to castigate without proper reason. Eliphaz had at least at first shown some consideration of Job, and when he witnessed the inconsiderate viciousness of Zophar, one would think he would at least have cautioned the younger man against excessive speech. But they were sadly united in their opposition to Job.



Bedouins



Archaeological Light

Origin and history of Bedouins in Pre-Islamic Times

The Arabian Peninsula is the original home of the Bedouin who spread out of its deserts into neighbouring fertile lands in their never ending search for pasture and plunder.

According to Arab tradition they are descendent from two main stocks: the first settled in the mountains of Southwestern Arabia (the Yemen), claim descent from Qahtan (Yoktan of the Bible) and became known as Yamanis. The second settled in North-Central Arabia, claimed descent from Ishmael and are called the Qaysis. Even now every Bedouin tribe still claims descent from one or the other group and the rivalry between the two has caused many civil wars throughout history, not only in the Arabian Peninsula, but all over the Arab world.

Yemen with its mountains and relatively wet climate early developed a settled agricultural and urban civilisation. Its Minaean Kingdom lasted from the 13th to the 7th century BC and was followed by the Kingdom of Saba (Sheba, 9th century BC to 115 BC), which had links with King Solomon and built the famous Ma'rib dam for irrigation around 750 B.C. It was followed by the Himyarite kingdom (115 BC to 525 AD), whose last king, Dhu-Nuwas, converted to Judaism in the early sixth century A.D. His kingdom fell to the Christian Abyssinians and later to the Persian Sassanid empire.

In central and north Arabia the nomadic Bedouin formed the majority of the

population. In the oases farming and small urban trading centres emerged, their settled population descended from the nomadic tribes. The farmers grew dates and grains and the small towns served as trading centres for the caravans transporting spices, ivory, and gold from southern Arabia and Africa to the lands of the fertile crescent. The distinction between desert nomads, town dwellers and farmers is still a characteristic of the Arab world.

Bedouin lifestyle involved migrating with their herds in search of pasture, supplying their produce to the oases markets, raiding the settled communities and the trade caravans that crossed the desert and levying tolls from them. There was no private ownership of land as each tribe held its pastures and water sources communally. Bedouin society was characterised by a fierce loyalty to family, clan and tribe which triggered blood feuds and demanded revenge killings. They had a rigid code of honour in which the chastity of their women was very important and which included hospitality and generosity.

Poetry was their greatest artistic attainment. Their poems celebrated heroic deeds of the tribe and its warriors and were recited around the camp fires. They were passed down orally from generation to generation.

The tribal chief was the Sheikh who was elected by the elders and was advised by a council of elders called the Majlis. He ruled by virtue of his personality and the respect it engendered, by negotiation, consensus and arbitration rather than by dictat. The office of Sheikh was often limited to a noble family, and did not pass automatically to the eldest son, but was open to any suitable member of the family who could gain the approval of the elders. This system could lead to violent quarrels between brothers.

The customary law of the ancestors, called the Sunnah, regulated all affairs of life in Bedouin society. A very important custom was blood vengeance which ordained that the relatives of a murdered man must kill the murderer or one of his relatives in revenge. The negotiated acceptance of blood money as compensation was the only way to stop the feud.

Mecca was the most important town in Arabia as its shrine, the Ka'ba, contained some 360 idols and served as a pilgrimage centre for all tribes. It was also an important trading town.

Over the centuries there were many cycles of overpopulation and drought that caused the Bedouin to move into the richer neighbouring lands of the Fertile Crescent.

Nabataean Arab tribes created a strong kingdom with its capital at Petra (the rock town in the mountains of Edom) during Roman and Byzantine times. Their

main wealth came from their control of the caravan trade routes, but they were also industrious desert farmers and merchants. The town of Palmyra (Tadmor) in the Syrian desert was another important Bedouin kingdom which flourished in the 3rd century until destroyed by the Romans in 273 A.D. The language and culture of these states was Aramaic with a strong Hellenistic influence.

In the first centuries AD some Arab tribes were converted to Christianity, an important centre being Najran in south Arabia. Other tribes all over the Arabian Peninsula converted to Judaism, Yatrib (Medina) being one of their centres. Most tribes however retained their old polytheistic religion.

Some Bedouin tribes on the edge of the desert established important buffer states between the Empires of that time. The Kingdom of Ghassan with its base on the Yarmuk river and loyal to Byzantium was established by Christian Monophysite tribes. Christian Nestorian tribes established the Kingdom of Hira, a vassal of the Persian Empire, near the southern Euphrates valley.

CHAPTER 21

JOB SILENCES ZOPHAR (vv.1-34).

The callous cruelty of Zophar's speech would surely cause some men to be bitterly angry, but while Job was incensed by such treatment, he did not lose his temper. He was well in control of himself in spite of so deeply feeling the anguish of his sufferings as well as the unfeeling criticism of his friends. After Job's speaking in this chapter, Zophar has nothing more to say.

THE SOLEMNITY OF DEALING WITH GOD (vv.1-16)

Rather than replying in the same controversial spirit that his friends had used, Job calmly appeals to them to consider carefully what he is saying. The fact that he controlled himself as he did ought to have impressed them sufficiently to at least give him some serious consideration. He asked them to bear with him in his speaking to them, and after he has had his say, to continue their mocking (vv.2-3). He had little hope that they would change their minds, no matter how solemnly he speaks.

He asks them, "Is my complaint against man?" Actually, his complaint was against the way God was dealing with him. But if they thought it was against man, then why should he not be impatient? (v.4). If it were men who were causing his suffering he would have had plenty of reason to complain. But it was God who was dealing with him. Were they really considering this fact? "Look at me," he says, "and be astonished, put your hand over your mouth" (v.5). They might well keep quiet, for they were not answering for God, the God who had allowed (or caused) him to be terrified and trembling (v.6). If they had been

really concerned for Job, could they not have prayed to God as to how to be of help to the poor sufferer? Probably they never thought of praying for him because they were sure they had the right answers for God without need of prayer.

WHY DO THE WICKED PROSPER? (vv.7-16)

Zophar had spoken of the wicked being cut off, but Job has questions now that Zophar does not even attempt to answer. Sometimes wicked men are cut off, but some wicked men live and become old and become mighty in power above others (v.7). Why? Their children often get along well with hardly a setback (v.8). They seem to have nothing to fear and the discipline of God's government seems not to apply to them (v.9). "Their bull breeds without failure; their cow calves without miscarriage" (v.10), while often the righteous find just the opposite experience. Their children enjoy life with its music and dancing, spending their days in wealth, "and in a moment go down to the grave" (vv.11-12). In other words, they know nothing of the painful experiences of Job all through their life, then die without suffering. Asaph observed this also, as he records in Psalm 73:3-9, and added in verses 16-17, "It was too painful for me - until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end." He learned that God's accounts are not settled in this life: there is a future to be considered.

At present, such wicked men can boldly say to God, "Depart from us, for we do not desire the knowledge of Your ways. Who is the Almighty that we should serve Him?" (vv.14-15). Can we imagine that God is indulgent with such an attitude? Certainly not! He shows marvellous patience, but this does not mean indifference. Those who defy God are in a far more dangerous condition than they realise, and future judgment is infinitely more terrible than Job's few years of suffering. They consider they have no profit in praying to God. Such is the self-centred pride of man! Their object is present advantage, but in ignorance they do not realise that even in this life they may find great profit in depending on God's grace.

They may think their prosperity is in their own hands, that they have only themselves to thank for this. How false indeed! God is the Giver of every temporal thing as well as spiritual. But men do not give God the credit due to Him (v.16). No wonder Job says, "The counsel of the wicked is far from me."

THE CHILDREN OF THE WICKED (vv.17-21)

Job asks, "How often is the lamp of the wicked put out?" It is certainly not always the case in this life, in fact it is not often the case (v.17). Sometimes, in an aggravated case, destruction might overtake them, but not often. They may be like straw or chaff before the wind, and therefore carried away eventually by

death, but present judgment does not seem to be often carried out (v.18). It may be rightly said, however, that "God lays up one's iniquity for his children," that is, that the children may afterward suffer for their fathers' sins, as Exodus 34:7 indicates, speaking of God "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation." This is certainly a warning to parents that their children will suffer the consequences of their parents' wickedness. God knows how to mete out recompense in an appropriate way (v.19).

Eventually the eyes of the wicked will see his own destruction, and he will drink the wrath of God, but it is a sad comment, "what does he care about his household after him?" Such is the callous selfishness always attending a course of wickedness. Though the number of his months is cut in half, this makes no difference to him (v.21).

CONTRARY EXPERIENCES (vv.22-26)

How foolish one is to suppose that he can teach God knowledge (v.22), since He judges those on high just as He does the lowest. Among the wicked there is such disparity that it is folly to think of judging by their experiences. Why? Because "one dies in his full strength, being wholly at rest and secure" (v.23). His possessions are kept intact and his health remains good until he dies (v.24). On the other hand, another wicked man dies in bitterness, his entire life having been deeply unpleasant. At the end "they lie down alike in the dust," that is, the end of the one is the same as the other, though their lives on earth were contrary. Who can possibly answer why? Zophar thought he had the answer to Job's troubles, but he had not considered this disparity with which Job faced him. Certainly the answer to all such questions must remain until after death.

JOB CHALLENGES HIS FRIENDS (vv.27-31)

Job strongly takes the offensive in this section. He discerns the schemes by which his friends would wrong him (v.27). For they asked, "where is the house of the prince?" - as much as to say that a person of princely character would not be reduced to dwell in the misery that Job was bearing (v.28). They thought that the dwelling place of the wicked corresponded to Job's circumstances. Had they not asked those who travelled the road of varied and contrary circumstances what was the reason for their disparity? (v.29).

Then Job speaks of what his friends had entirely missed, that is, the judgment of the future. "For the wicked are spared for the day of doom" (v.30). "Spared" is the proper translation here, indicating that God now spares them trouble in view of a later "day of doom." Though allowed to hide from present recompense, they will be brought out in the day of God's wrath.

Job then asks, "Who condemns his way to his face? and who repays him for what he has done?" (v.32). Job's friends were condemning him to his face, but there is only one answer to the two questions he asks. Only God has the right to condemn. Only God will recompense man's sin.

THE END IN DEATH (vv.32-33)

At least in death the end of a wicked man's prosperity is reached: he is brought down to the grave (v.32). His burial may be with a vigil and outward display of great honour. Large numbers may follow his coffin to the grave with such pomp and ceremony that is really only a mockery since he has actually "died without mercy. "

HIS CONCLUSION (v.34)

Job's friends certainly did not think that Job's end would be with such fanfare, but many of the wicked would end in this way. Therefore Job could rightly ask them, "How then can you comfort me with empty words, since falsehood remains in your answers?" They had compared Job to the wicked, but not to the wicked who prospered in the world: the fact of the wicked prospering they had not even considered.

At this point Job has clearly won the argument, so that the replies of Eliphaz and Bildad, while couched in impressive language, are practically empty. Eliphaz is totally unfair in his response, and Bildad's response is both brief and weak. Zophar is silenced, while Job afterward speaks with unabated vigour for six chapters.

CHAPTER 22 - THE IRRITABLE REPLY OF ELIPHAZ

22-31. Third cycle of speeches

Ch. 22. Eliphaz' third speech

Ch. 23-24. Job's reply

Ch. 25. Bildad's third speech

Ch. 26. Job's reply

Ch. 27-31. Job's closing words of self-vindication

JOB'S SIN EXPOSED BEFORE GOD (vv.1-8)

Eliphaz considered that he was representing God in speaking, and exposing what he imagined were the sins of Job. He first asks a question that it is well worth considering, "Can a man be profitable to God, though he who is wise may be profitable to himself?" (v.2). Certainly it is folly for anyone to think that he is doing God a favour by his righteousness, for to be perfectly right is nothing

more than he should be. But in Eliphaz speaking to Job, this was beside the point, for he considered that Job was wicked, not righteous.

Eliphaz questions, "Is it because of your fear of Him that He corrects you, and enters into judgment with you? (v.4). Eliphaz considered this impossible, and therefore that Job did not fear God at all. But actually it was true that, because of Job's fear of God, God was correcting him. But what Eliphaz considered God's judgment against Job was not judgment at all, but discipline and correction.

Then Eliphaz comes out with his strong accusation against Job, though having not the slightest proof if it, "Is not your wickedness great, and your iniquity without end? (v.5). Probably Eliphaz considered that Job's professed fear of God was total hypocrisy, and therefore Job deserved the greatest censure. Eliphaz was just the man to give that censure, for he was sure he was speaking for God. How sad was the delusion under which he was labouring! How carefully we must watch against any tendency on our own part to jump to conclusions as regards the condition of any other believer, or as regards our suspicion of anything in their life that may seem questionable. "Love believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor.13:7).

A LIST OF ACCUSATIONS (vv.6-17)

Eliphaz has worked himself up to such a state that he allows his imagination to run wild, daring to make a number of specific accusations against Job that were totally false. He says, "You have taken pledges from your brother for no reason, and stripped the naked of their clothing" (v.6). He did not however say what brother he was referring to, nor of what naked people Job was guilty of harming.

He also blamed Job for what he says Job had not done in regard to providing water or food for those who needed it (v.7). How did Eliphaz know this? He would have to be acquainted with all Job's life to have any such knowledge. Of course God knew what Job had done and what he had not done, and evidently Eliphaz thought that he shared God's knowledge!

In verse 8 Eliphaz is apparently charging that Job in the past as a mighty man possessed the land, dwelling in it as though he was honourable. But according to the principles of Eliphaz, Job must have been guilty of oppressing the widows and the fatherless.

"Therefore," he says, "snares are all around you, and sudden fear troubles you, or darkness, so that you cannot see; and an abundance of water covers you" (vv.10-11). He first reasons backward from the fact of Job's sufferings, seeing this trouble as the result of Job's wickedness; then he reasons forward, telling

Job that because he has been so wicked this trouble has come upon him. This kind of thing is true of many people: they argue with no basis of actual fact, but from the viewpoint of their own suppositions. Only established fact can rightly be a true basis of discussion.

GOD'S INFINITE KNOWLEDGE (vv.12-14)

In this section Eliphaz only shows how grossly unfair he is. He accuses Job of saying what Job had not said at all. Is not God in the height of heaven? And see the stars how lofty they are" (v.12). "And you say, What does God know?" (v.13). Of course God is in the height of heaven, and Job had fully acknowledged this before (ch.9:4-12). Yet Eliphaz accuses Job of saying, "What does God know?" Job had spoken in complete contrast to this, declaring that "with Him are wisdom and strength, He has counsel and understanding" etc. (Ch.12:13).

Why did Eliphaz then accuse Job as he did? Because he thought he discerned this attitude underneath what Job actually said. He considered that Job was hiding something in "the deep darkness," and thought that God could not see it because clouds covered Him (v.14). Whatever it was that Job had been guilty of, Eliphaz could not see it, though that did not keep him from condemning Job.

THE WAY OF THE WICKED (vv.15-18)

Eliphaz now asks Job if he will keep to the old way the wicked men have trodden (v.15), for he is sure that Job is bent on a wicked course. He says these wicked men had been cut down before their time, with their foundations swept away by a flood (v.16). He totally ignores what Job had argued in his answer to Zophar, that many wicked men had been cut down (ch.21:7-17), for he had no answer for this. He admits that the Almighty had fitted the houses of the wicked with good things, though they had said to God, "Depart from us" (vv.17-18). But he considered that the wicked would be cut down before their time, like Job was being cut down, and thus he side-steps the fact that many wicked men fill out their lives in pleasure without any infliction of trouble. He says "the counsel of the wicked is far from me." But the counsel of the wicked was just as far from Job as from Eliphaz, though Eliphaz wanted by this statement to show himself in contrast to Job!

THE PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED (vv.19-20)

Eliphaz considered himself righteous and speaks of the righteous being glad at the punishment of the wicked. This will be true when God's judgments are in the earth, such as is seen in Revelation 18:20 concerning the false woman Babylon, over whose judgment the righteous will greatly rejoice. Did Eliphaz think he was right in rejoicing over Job's sufferings, and actually laughing at him? (v.19).

When he says, "Surely our adversaries are cut down, and the fire consumes their remnant" (v.20), was he not inferring that Job was his adversary, since Job had been "cut down" and was suffering the fire of God's punishment? Thus he really considered that Job was an enemy of God, not a believer at all.

APPEALING TO JOB TO REPENT (vv.21-25)

The advice of Eliphaz to Job is now seen in telling him to acquaint himself with God and be at peace (v.21). He was flatly refusing to believe that Job knew God at all, and was therefore sure Job needed to be converted to have good come to him. At least he did not consider Job's case hopeless, but Job would have to take his advice and "return to the Almighty." He urged Job to receive instruction from God. It is surely right to lay up God's words in our heart, but to accept the words of Eliphaz as God's word is a different matter. Job had not left the Almighty, therefore to tell him to return was insulting (vv.22-23). Let us never treat a suffering believer as an unbeliever.

The fact that Job was suffering was proof to Eliphaz that Job had departed from God, and if he would return he would be built up, with all iniquity being removed from him. He would be greatly blessed with the finest gold. He adds that "the Almighty will be your gold and your precious silver" (v.25). This reminds us of the words of the Lord to Abram, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield and your exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15: 1). But it does not seem likely that Eliphaz was personally enjoying the blessing of realising God Himself as his own true wealth. If so, he would not have been so unfairly representing God.

A BRIGHT FUTURE - IF (vv.26-30)

Now Eliphaz paints a lovely picture of the prospect of the godly man, an incentive to cause Job to repent. It is wonderful to have "delight in he Almighty" and to lift up one's face to God, to truly pray to Him with confidence that He will bear (vv.26-27). Eliphaz adds also, "You will pay your vows." If Job had made vows, he had likely paid them, though today the Lord Jesus tells believers not to make vows at all (Mt.5:33-37).

"You will also declare a thing, and it will be established for you; so light will shine in your ways" (v.28). In other words, what is spoken in faith will have positive results, and the ways of a believer will be manifest as "in the light." If one is cast down, yet has confidence that eventual exaltation will come, then God will save that humble person (v.29). Eliphaz allows the fact that a believer may be cast down, but he does not apply this to Job unless Job will take his advice to repent. But if so, then he tells Job that he will be in a position to help others, even to the point of delivering those who are innocent (v.30). In fact,

Eliphaz was seeking to do this very thing for Job, considering that the purity of his own hands would deliver Job, if only Job would repent.

CHAPTER 23 - JOB'S REPLY (Ch.23-24)

HE LONGS TO LAY HIS CASE BEFORE GOD (vv.1-9)

What Eliphaz has said to Job was hardly worth an answer, so that Job practically ignores this and lays before his friends the actual distresses that occupied his mind and heart. They had had no answer for this before, and when he is finished they still have no answer. In spite of all that his friends have said, he tells them, "Even today my complaint is bitter" (v.2). Their much talk had not changed anything for him. He continued to groan in anguish, and says, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come to His seat. I would present my case before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments" (vv.3-4). He wanted God, but felt God had withdrawn from him and would not answer his prayers. How little did he realise that God knew perfectly what Job was feeling and what he was thinking. He did not have to give Job a public audience to air his complaints. In fact, when finally God dealt directly with Job, Job had no arguments to present to Him at all. His first response to God was, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth" (Job 40:3-4).

But he indicates in verse 5 that if he was just allowed to present his case to God, then he would have an answer that he could understand, for he was sure that God was righteous, in contrast to his friends, and that God would rather take note of him as one who was righteous, not wicked (v.6). Did Job think he needed to argue his case with God, to persuade God that, because he was comparatively righteous, there was no reason for God allowing him to suffer as he did.

He speaks of the upright reasoning with God (v.7). But an upright man should realise he should never dare to reason with God as though he could persuade God to change his mind. However, Job thinks that by this means he would be delivered forever from having to endure what he feels as God's judgment, which was not actually judgment, but discipline. Thank God we know today that our arguments or reasonings have nothing to do with being delivered from judgment, but only the value of the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus accomplish this wonderful result, when one receives Him simply by faith.

Job feels he has tried everything to find where he may meet with God. He had gone forward and backward and to his right hand and his left, but was left completely frustrated. He could not find God. Actually, God was not far from

him, and God was seeking Job's deepest blessing. Job would not find it by his seeking, but by honest submission to God's hand.

JOB DEFENDS HIS OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS (vv.10-12)

This section shows the reason that Job found himself unable to find God. Job's own righteousness was the hindrance. He insists that God knew the way that Job took and that God's test of Job would prove him to "come forth as gold" (v.16). In comparison to others this was no doubt true. His foot had held fast to God's guiding steps: he had kept God's way - contrary to what his friends had said about him. Not only had he not departed from God's commandments, but he had positively treasured God's words more than his necessary food. Because he was the most righteous man on earth, he had too much confidence in his righteousness, and it was necessary for God to take from him the pride that his righteousness had occasioned in him.

Job now had to learn the lesson that his own righteousnesses were to God only "filthy rags," just as Paul had to deeply learn this lesson. Paul writes of reasons he had previously had for confidence in the flesh, ending with, "concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless" (Phil.3:4-6), "but," he adds, "what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ" (v.7). He would no longer put any confidence in all his virtues. Job later learned this too (Job 42:5-6).

AFRAID OF GOD (vv.13-17)

"But He is unique, and who can make Him change?" (v.13). Certainly God is unique, but Job thought His uniqueness was limited to awe inspiring majesty, and did not understand God's unique love and grace. Job says that God does whatever His soul desires, but he thought God's desires had no reference to the actual need of His creatures. How totally wrong was this conception! It is true enough that God performs whatever may be appointed for people (v.14), but His appointments are not intended to inspire terror in the heart of a believer, as this did with Job. Indeed, why did he seek God's presence if he was "terrified at His presence?" (v.15). But this is one of the inconsistencies of one who focuses on his troubles rather than on the grace of God.

Job thought it was God who made his heart weak, and that it was God Himself who terrified Job. Why? Because God did not cut him off in death before he had to face the darkness and deep darkness that had now overtaken him (vv.16-17).

CHAPTER 24

DOES GOD FAIL TO GOVERN PROPERLY? (vv.1-12)

"Why are not times treasured up with the Almighty? Why do not they who know Him see His days?" (v.1 - JND trans.) Job wonders why God (who is Almighty) does not take account of all that takes place in time, and why those who know Him do not witness on His part any serious dealing with gross evil when it is present. For, he says, "Some remove landmarks," thereby stealing land from others; they violently steal flocks of sheep and feed on them; "they drive away the donkey of the fatherless; they take the widow's ox a pledge. They push the needy off the road," forcing the poor of the land to hide (vv.2-4). These were evils publicly known to take place. Job's friends did not have any such clear charge to lay against him, but only imagined he must have done wrong. But here were cases of manifest wickedness, and God had not dealt with them as He was dealing with Job.

He goes on to speak of the way in which the poor were oppressed by evil men, "like wild donkeys in the desert, they go out to their work," searching for food in the wilderness, gleaning in vineyards, often with little clothing and exposed to the cold night air or the showers of rain, huddling together to seek some semblance of shelter.

"Some snatch the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge from the poor. They cause the poor to go naked, without clothing; and they take away the sheaves from the hungry" (vv.9-10). Sheaves might have furnished a little food by beating out the grain, but even this was stolen from the poor.

Cruel men would employ them to press out oil and to tread winepresses, yet give them not even enough in wages to quench their thirst. Some were groaning in the pangs of death and the souls of the wounded were crying out. "Yet," Job says, "God does not charge them (the oppressors) with wrong" (v.12). But Eliphaz was charging Job with wrong.

BOLD REBELLION AGAINST GOD (vv.13-17)

Surely Job's friends knew he could not be classed with those who "rebel against the light" (v.13). This is not only sin moved by greed, but that moved by bold defiance of God. There was, and is, light that can be of great blessing to those who value it, but many "choose darkness rather than light," not merely giving in to their weaknesses, but deliberately choosing the ways of wilful evil.

"The murderer rises with the light" (v.14), though he does not know the light. Without compunction he kills the poor and needy. If he commits his evil action

at night, he is like a thief, hiding until the moment he chooses to murder his victim.

The adulterer waits until it is dark enough that no one will recognise him, and in the dark breaks into a house which he has marked in the daytime, to commit his cruel crime of rape. Has society changed since Job's time? Not at all! There are still such crimes committed every day. People keep on demanding more laws to combat such things, but laws do not change men's rebellious hearts. They need to be saved by the grace of God.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE - NOW? (vv.18-21)

How many since Job have felt that something decisive should be done to curb the many glaring evils that plague society. Should not their recompense be swift? "Their portion should be cursed in the earth" (v.18), Job thinks; so that others would not turn into the way of their vineyards, that is, to follow the wicked because they prosper.

"As drought and heat consume the snow waters, so Sheol consumes those who have sinned" (v.19). This is true, but just as true of the righteous as of the wicked, speaking of their eventual end on earth. "The womb should forget him, the worm should feed sweetly on him; he should be remembered no more, and wickedness should be broken like a tree" (v.20). Though Job is speaking of what "should be," there is no doubt that these things will be the eventual end of the ungodly, so it would have been more wise for him to calmly wait for God's action to take place in its time, rather than to complain that His judgment was too slow. But Job ends this section with a strong reason for which judgment on the wicked should be swift, "For he preys on the barren who do not bear, and does no good for the widow" (v.21). This was certainly not a description of Job himself.

IS GOD THE PROTECTOR OF EVIL MEN? (vv.22-25)

Not only did Job feel that God was lax in His judgment of evil, but that God actually protected people in their course of wickedness. He thought that God used His power to draw the mighty evildoers away from the crowd, so that no man was sure of life (v.22). "He gives them (the wicked) security, and they rely on it; yet His eyes are on their ways" (v.23). Job knew this was true, that God perceived all they were doing, yet continued to protect them from harm.

"They are exalted for a little while, then they are gone. They are brought low; they are taken out of the way like all others; they dry out like the heads of grain" (v.24). At least Job recognised that the exaltation of the wicked was only for a little while, then they were brought low and taken away, "like all others," that is,

they only shared the same end as others who were not wicked. If we consider this life only, then certainly everything is out of balance and frustrating. But all God's accounts are not settled on this side of the grave.

However, Job's friends were not considering eternity either, and as regards Job's arguments concerning the prosperity of the wicked, he challenges his friends to prove him a liar (v.25). Certainly they could not do that, and Bildad's reply does not even attempt this.

CHAPTER 25

BILDAD'S REPLY THE GREATNESS OF GOD (vv.1-3)

The brevity of Bildad's reply is evidence that he had no answer to Job's predicament. He confines himself rather to fundamental facts that were important for all mankind, verses 1-3 dealing briefly with God's supremacy and power. "Dominion and fear belong to Him" (v.2). The greatness of His dominion is such as to inspire a wholesome fear in every creature. This was nothing new to Job, for he had insisted on this himself. "He makes peace in His high places." This peace was certainly not on earth, as Job was experiencing. When Christ was born, the angels announced, "on earth peace" (Lk.2:13-14), but peace did not follow and has not followed on earth since then. Why not? Because mankind rejected the very One who is "the Prince of Peace".

Then when the Lord was on the verge of His great sacrifice of Calvary, as He entered Jerusalem, the crowd who gathered were moved by God to say, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" (Lk.19:37-38). Though earth refused Him, heaven very soon received Him (after His resurrection), and anyone today who wants true peace will find it only in looking to the Prince of Peace in heaven. The day will yet come when the Lord Jesus will establish peace on earth, but not until He returns in judgment, to judge every evil thing that raises its head against the Lord of glory. Of course, Bildad did not understand in what way the Lord "makes peace in His high places," but how good it is for us to understand it today!

"Is there any, number to His armies?" (v.3). The Lord Jesus assured His disciples that if He asked the Father, He would provide him with "more than twelve legions of angels" (Mt. 25:53). Do angels have power? One angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrians in one night! (2 Kings 19:35).

Also, "Upon whom does His light not arise?" Just as the sun rises on all the earth (Ps. 19:6), so the Lord Jesus is the true light who, coming into the world,

shed His light upon everyone (Jn.1:9). Of course Bildad had no knowledge of this, and little realised that God moved him to speak in this way

THE NOTHINGNESS OF MAN (vv.4-6)

Since God is so great, "what is man?" Can men possibly be righteous before God? Can one born of a woman be pure? Naturally there is no hope of man ever attaining such righteousness and purity, for man is a totally corrupted sinner. Bildad however was not applying this humbling lesson to himself, but to Job! But we all need to learn this as regards ourselves. The New Testament supplies the answer to this serious question. Man can be righteous before God, but only by faith in the Lord Jesus who has suffered for our sins. Righteousness is not ours by nature, but is imputed to believers only because of their faith in Christ (Rom. 4:20-24).

CHAPTER 26 - JOB'S REPLY

BILDAD'S WORDS FUTILE IN JOB'S CASE (vv.1-4)

Job begins a reply that continues through six chapters, and his friends are totally silenced. His language is amazing, specially considering the length of his discourse. He asks Bildad, "How have you helped him who is without power?" (v.2). For Job fully admitted his utter weakness in the face of his sufferings, and what he needed was help, not condemnation. If it was true that Job lacked wisdom (as Bildad intimated), where was there any wise counsel in Bildad's words? Job admitted that he did not know why God was dealing with him as He did, but his friends gave false answers to this question, so their advice was totally unsound.

"To whom have you uttered words?" (v.4). They would say they were speaking to Job, but their words were really not for him at all, but for an evil person. "And whose spirit came from you?" For Job did not consider that it was the Spirit of God who was moving Bildad.

GOD RULING IN THE DEPTHS (vv.5-6)

Bildad had spoken of God's greatness, but Job goes far beyond him in giving such honour to God. He speaks of various spheres in which God's greatness is seen, beginning here with those in death and under the water. This is the sphere of "things under the earth" spoken of in Philippians 2: 10. They tremble before God. Sheol (the state of souls and spirits as separated from their bodies) is naked before Him, in contrast to our own ignorance of those in Sheol. The state of destruction is chaos to us, but it is laid bare before God in its actual condition. He is superior to what is low and infernal.

HIS AUTHORITY IN THE HEAVENS (v.7)

Though in contrast to the depths, the heights are also in the hand of God. "He stretches out the north over the empty space." Had astronomers in Job's time observed that in the north there is a large space in which no stars are observable? We understand it is common knowledge among astronomers now. "He hangs the earth upon nothing." Mythology had all sorts of foolish explanations as to how the earth is sustained. But Job's assertion is perfectly accurate, as science has confirmed since his day. What amazing power must be involved in God's maintaining the earth in its orbit, and all the planets and stars!

CLOUDS AND WATERS ARE IN HIS CONTROL (vv.8-10)

Here is God's amazing power seen also in His drawing up waters and binding them in clouds (v.8). Tremendous amounts of water are contained in clouds, yet the clouds are not broken through this, - until of course the time comes for God to release the water in rain upon the earth. In recent times we have heard of as much as three feet of rain coming as a deluge on earth in one day! How that rain was sustained in clouds until the time of its release is an astounding miracle.

Clouds too are symbolical of the obscurity by which the throne of God is covered (v.9). Psalm 97:2 tells us, "Clouds and darkness surround Him: righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne."

In verse 10, another version speaks of "the dim verge of the horizon" as being the boundary of light and darkness. This is "on the face of the waters." If one looks across the sea, the horizon appears to be a boundary beyond which all seems dark. Thus the greatness of God faces men with marvellous mysteries that awaken many questions that human wisdom cannot answer.

THE EARTH AND THE SEA (vv.11-12)

The term, "the pillars of heaven" evidently refers to the earth with its great mountains reaching toward heaven, pillars that often tremble when an earthquake strikes with its awesome demonstration of the power of God.

That power is seen in the sea also when it is stirred by fierce winds. Even on the small "Sea of Galilee" the disciples were filled with fear of being overwhelmed by the storm (Mk.4:27-38), and the oceans experience far greater storms than Galilee. But if such storms awaken both fear and awe at the power of God, God's rapid breaking up of the storm is also a cause of wondering awe (v.12). The disciples of the Lord Jesus found this too when "He arose and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." (Mk.4:39).

SUPREME IN HEAVEN (v.13)

"By His Spirit He adorned the heavens." We surely know this is true today God, by His Spirit, raised the Lord Jesus from death and set Him at His own right hand in glory. Heaven is therefore adorned with the glories of One who has won the victory over sin and death. Not that Job was thinking of this adornment, but God had it in mind from eternity "His hand pierced the fleeing serpent." Satan conceived the notion of ascending into heaven and being "like the Most High" (Isa.14:13-14), but the Most High pierced this proud serpent with a word of solemn conviction. God alone rules in heaven.

But though Job has far outdone Bildad in declaring God's glory, he adds, "indeed, these are mere edges of His ways, and how small a whisper we hear of Him." In contrast to that small whisper, Job asks, "but the thunder of His power who can understand?" (v.14). Does it not put us all in our place?

CHAPTER 27 - JOB'S SELF-DEFENCE

HOLDING FAST HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS (vv.1-7)

In Chapter 26 Job answered Bildad fully. Bildad's last argument was very brief, and after this Zophar had nothing at all to say. Job has already won the debate, though he fully, admits that he has not found the relief he is seeking. Now he spends five chapters in his self-defence, which will get him nowhere as regards the answer to his distressing condition, for his comparatively righteous life had nothing to do with the answer to his questions.

He knows that God lives, but claims that God had taken away the justice Job felt he deserved. He knew that God is Almighty, but he accused God of making his soul bitter (v.2). He says that as long as he is able to breathe, his lips would not speak wickedness nor his tongue deceit (vv.3-4). Thus he flatly contradicted the accusations of his friends. He would not give them the least encouragement in telling them they, were right in any, measure (v.5). He was determined to cling to his integrity, and insists, "My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go; my heart shall not reproach me as long as I live" (v.6).

His friends had no proof whatever to the contrary of what Job said, for his actions had been good, but at the end of this book, Job's attitude is wonderfully changed. The one who had such confidence in his own righteousness, when face to face with God, said, I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (ch.42:5-6). The question of his good conduct was set aside entirely, when he saw, not merely, his past life, but himself in the light of God's presence. He abhorred himself, rather than defending himself.

Job ends this section by expressing the desire that his enemy, (one who opposed his claim of righteousness) would be like the wicked, not worth considering, and one who rose against him in his claim would be like the unrighteous, a contrast to Job himself (v.7). If this applied to his friends, let them consider it!

THE HOPE OF THE HYPOCRITE (vv.8-12)

Job's friends had accused him of hypocrisy, but he asks them as to the hypocrite's end. Though he gained much in this world, what can he do when God takes away his life? "Will God hear his cry, when trouble comes upon him?" (v.9). In fact, would a hypocrite delight himself in God to such an extent as to call upon God Himself? (v.10). It is not the character of such an evil man to really call on God, yet it was evident to Job's friends that Job was crying out to God in his affliction.

Job therefore realised that his friends needed teaching as regards the hand of God, so he would teach them (v.11). It was true they needed such teaching, though Job himself needed teaching of a different kind than he perceived his friends needed, for "the hand of God" is a tremendous subject. What Job knew about God's hand he would not conceal, but there was much indeed he did not know, as we all must realise in our ignorance.

Still, he tells his friends they had seen God's hand in operation, and instead of considering soberly what was involved in these actions of God, they, were behaving with complete nonsense! (v.12).

THE CERTAIN DOOM OF THE UNGODLY (vv.13-18)

Job now proceeds to declare in language similar to that of his friends, the eventual doom of the wicked. But unlike his friends, he showed this in contrast to his own eventual end. They had spoken this way to identify Job as being wicked. But his summary of the wicked and their end actually shows the impossibility of Job's being identified as one of them. There seems to be similarities in Job's experience to that of the wicked, as in verse 14, if his children are multiplied, it is for the sword, and his offspring shall not be satisfied with bread." Job's children had all been killed in a sudden catastrophe (ch.1:18-19), but Job is thinking beyond the present, to consider the eventual end of the wicked. His thoughts are surely inconsistent, for he has before so dwelt upon his own present circumstances that he could hardly see farther.

"Those who survive him shall be buried in death, and their widows shall not weep." Some may have a little longer, but the grave will soon claim them, and their widows would not even weep because they would feel no loss in the death of an evil husband.

He may heap up abundance of riches, like the rich man of Luke 12:16-21, who said in his soul, - Soul, you have many goods laid up for many, years, take your case, eat, drink and be merry. But God said to him, Fool! this night your soul will be required of you, then whose will those things be which you have provided? Thus one may pile up riches, but others, less foolish than he, will reap its benefits. The absolute folly of mankind is certainly evident in all this. We all know that our lives are very short at best. In fact, what is 100 years compared to eternity? If we insure our lives for that long, what do we have when it is over? If one leaves Christ out of his life, he has only torment to look forward to!

TOTAL OBLIVION (vv.19-23)

Thus the rich unbeliever lies down, then opens his eyes to find himself in torment, where terrors overtake him as a flood, the tempest of God's judgment takes him away (vv.19-20). This is graphic language, but Job is not so specific as the Lord Jesus was in Luke 16:23, concerning the rich man who died, "and being in Hades, lifted up his eyes." Thus, after death there is torment for the wicked. "The east wind carries him away" (v.21). The east wind is often spoken of in scripture as signifying God's judgment (Ex. 14:21). That judgment is slow to arise, but when it comes, it "does not spare" (v.22). Men may try to flee desperately from its power, as they do from hurricanes, but to no avail.

"Men shall clap their hands at him, and shall hiss him out of his place" (v.23). Rather than sorrowing at his disgraceful death, those who have known him will be glad he is gone. It is evident that Job had no fear whatever of his sharing a judgment like this, and his friends ought to have easily recognised that these things would not be true of Job. It would have been wise for them to frankly apologise to Job for their cruel charges against him.

CHAPTER 28 - WISDOM: PRICELESS AND PURE

EARTH'S MEASURED TREASURES (vv.1-6)

Job has spoken of the folly of wicked men. Now he shows that which stands in beautiful contrast to Chapter 27. The language here is magnificent, as Job considers what is altogether objective, not at all continuing any defence of himself in this chapter, but extolling the virtues of wisdom, showing that all creation bears witness to the greatness of the wisdom of God. In thinking of this chapter, we should do well to compare it to Proverbs 8:12-31, where wisdom is seen to be personified in the Lord Jesus Christ. This is confirmed in 1 Corinthians 1:23-24.

But first, in verses 1-6 Job speaks of the places where the treasures of earth may be found. "There is a mine for silver and a place where gold is refined. Iron is

taken from the earth, and copper is smelted from ore" (vv.1-2). God has seen fit to put these metals in places where men can find them without difficulty, and men certainly make much use of them, though they are largely ignorant of the spiritual truths that are symbolised by these metals. Gold speaks of the glory of God; silver, of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; iron, of the strength of the kingdom of God; and copper, of the holiness of God.

Even in the dark caverns of the earth, man introduces light to put an end to darkness (v.3), that he may search for ore. He sinks a shaft into the earth in places away from civilisation (v.4), let themselves down by ropes, and swing to and fro with the object of finding the metal they desire.

The earth itself produces bread, that is, grain, though deeper down the earth is turned up as by fire (v.5). "Its stones are the source of sapphires" (v.6). Stones by intense heat produce precious stones, and gold dust is found where heat has been. Job intimates that man knows these things and takes advantage of them.

HIDDEN TREASURES (vv.7-11)

In this section Job speaks of things more hidden from people normally, but which God brings to light (v.11). There is a path that no bird knows, though it can fly high above earth to observe what is below. No falcon's eye (which is amazingly keen) discerns it (v.7). The proud or fierce lion cannot by his superior strength, force his way into it (v.8).

But God's hand accomplishes what creatures cannot, even overturning mountains at the roots, to expose what is hidden beneath (v.9). Through the hard rocks He cuts out channels, using water to wear away the rock. And in those rocks "He sees every precious thing," which man would not discover till God saw fit to expose it (v.10). On streams on which man may expect to find treasure, He places darns that thwart men's intentions. But in the end, even what is hidden God brings forth (v.11).

All of these things, whether manifest wonders (vv.1-6) or more hidden things in nature, God has made available for the blessing of man.

BUT WHERE IS WISDOM? (vv.12-14)

But wisdom is only a dim vision in the distance, which men grasp after, but in all their searching they are totally disillusioned. "Where can it be found?" Job asks (v.12). Man by nature has no perception even of its value, nor is it found "in the land of the living" (v.13). Men have plunged into the depths of the sea, but wisdom is not there, though God's wisdom manifestly controls the raging oceans (v.14). For we cannot obtain wisdom even by closely observing the fact

of His hand of great power in all the marvellous phenomena of creation. We observe His wisdom, but wisdom eludes us.

WISDOM'S PRICELESS VALUE (vv.15-19)

Job's friends had considered they had "the secrets of wisdom" (ch.11:6), but Job easily discerned that their arguments were not wise at all. He therefore faces them with the fact that wisdom is not so easily obtained. In fact, wisdom is impossible to be bought with gold or silver (v.15).

Job continues his subject of wisdom, saying that the finest gold (from Ophir) or onyx or sapphire stones, or crystal, or jewellery of fine gold have no value whatever compared to the value of wisdom (vv.16-17). Coral and quartz are not worth mentioning, nor rubies either, in estimating the value of wisdom, nor the topaz of Ethiopia, nor any pure gold (vv.18-19). In other words, absolutely nothing in nature can approach the value of true wisdom, for this is spiritual, not natural. Well indeed does God say in regard to what man considers wisdom, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (1 Cor.1:19). On the other hand, 1 Corinthians 2:7 tells us, "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory." This wisdom is received only through faith in the Lord Jesus, by the revelation of the Spirit of God (v.10). How wonderful is this, far above all natural comprehension!

REPORTED BUT UNKNOWN (vv.20-22)

Job knew there is such a thing as wisdom, and men generally, realise that wisdom does exist. But where? All man's searching does not find it: "it is hidden from the eyes of all living" and even "concealed from the birds of the air" (vv.20-21). Though highly elevated above man, the birds have no understanding of it. Let us remember too that the birds of the air are typical of spirits, the unclean birds symbolising unclean spirits. God's wisdom is above the conception of these. "Destruction and death say, We have heard a report about it with our ears" (v.' 22), but only a report, for wisdom itself is known only by a direct revelation from God.

THE ONLY SOURCE OF WISDOM (vv.23-27)

"God understands its way and He knows its place" (v.23). Thus Job rises high above the speculations of men, who by nature have no idea of wisdom. God alone is the Source of wisdom. He understands it in absolute perfection, He who has established "the ends of the earth" and contemplates all that is "under the whole heaven," as no creature can possibly do (v.24).

It is wisdom far higher than man's conception that "established a weight for the wind" (v.25). For though air weighs nothing, yet the wind has such tremendous weight to it that it can break rocks in pieces (1 Ki.19: 11). Also God "apportions the water by measure." Who could even think of measuring the water of the oceans? Yet these things are perfectly under the control of our great Creator, and wisdom, no less than power, is manifest in such mighty works.

"He made a law for the rain" (v.26) as to how and when it is to be released, and in precisely what areas; and man has no ability whatever to change that law. Nor does man understand why God withholds the rain at certain times and places, and sends excessive rain at the times and places that He chooses. But all of this is subject to the laws of nature which God has established. "A path for the thunderbolt" indicates that thunder is not haphazard, but is always under wise supervision. In all this God's wisdom is declared (v.27). He prepared wisdom, He searched it out, leaving not one iota of its operation without fullest consideration. Does this not impress our souls with wondering admiration?

THE ESSENCE OF WISDOM FOR MAN (v.28)

This one verse gives a wonderful conclusion to the subject of wisdom. Job discerned this, though men generally have no regard for this simple yet profound pronouncement, "To man He said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding" (v.28). The only reason that wisdom eludes people is that "there is no fear of God before their eyes," so that they have no heart to depart from evil. The fear of the Lord is not terror, but a wholesome reverence that gives Him the place of supreme honour. Job recognised this, even though he had not been blessed with the revelation of the person of Christ, who is Wisdom personified, but his words surely show that the accusations of his friends were untrue.

CHAPTER 29

JOB'S PAST GREATNESS

In this chapter Job dwells upon the honour and dignity that had been his in the past. While he was sincere in what he said, and no doubt spoke truthfully, yet there is far too much of "sell" in what he says, so that in this way Chapter 29 is a contrast to Chapter 28, where he had given the Lord His place of supreme excellence. Nor had Job learned the truth of Ecclesiastes 7:10, "Do not say, Why were the former days better than these? For you do not enquire wisely concerning this." In fact, Paul goes further than this in saying, "But what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ" (Phil.3:7), so that he could add, "One thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal of the upward

call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil.3:13-14). We surely ought to give God credit for knowing just what we need and at what time. If He has blessed us in the past, let us thank God, and therefore trust him for the present and the future.

Thinking of his circumstances at home, Job well remembered the days of his prime (v.4), when God's evident blessing was that of friendly counsel (though he now thought that God had virtually changed from a friend to an enemy). "When the Almighty was yet with me, when my children were around me" (v.5). His circumstances were so pleasant that he considered this as an evidence of God's presence with him, but now his children were gone: his home life had been virtually desolated, and even his wife had been no help to him in his adversity (ch.19), though he does not even mention her. But in contrast to his present circumstances, his steps were bathed with cream and he was figuratively blessed with "rivers of oil."

HONORED BEFORE MEN (vv.7-10)

Now Job speaks of his going out to the gate of the city, the place of public administration (v.7), taking his seat there, his dignity being such that young men instinctively retired and aged men rose up in his honour (v.8). Authorities would not take the lead in speaking, for everyone would wait upon Job (vv.9-10). If someone other than Job had said this, it would be impressive, but when Job speaks this way, he exposes the pride of his self-importance in such a way as to reveal why it was necessary for God to bring him down. Though these things might be perfectly true, yet he ought not to have dared to glory in such honour. Actually, the honour men give to us should only humble us to the dust. In fact, how good it is for every believer to take to heart the words of the Lord Jesus, "I do not receive honour from men" (Jn.5:41).

JOB'S GOOD DEEDS APPROVED BY OTHERS (vv.11-17)

However, it was not merely Job's outward position of dignity that caused people to honour him, but his consistent kindness toward others. People blessed him because he "delivered the poor," the fatherless, and those who had no other source of help (v.12). If one was dying, Job was there to give help, and he gave widows cause to sing for joy (v.13). He was zealous for the cause of righteousness and justice (v.14), and was in effect "eyes to the blind and feet to the lame" (v.15). He was in practice "a father to the poor," searching out the truth of a case that might not be easily apparent (v.16). He opposed the wicked, breaking their fangs, their ability to gain by oppression; and rescuing victims from their clutches (v.17).

No wonder God says of Job, "there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil" (ch.1:8). Yet how deeply

did Job need to learn the lesson of the words of the Lord Jesus, "do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing" (Mt. 6:3). There is never a reason that we should advertise the good things that we do. If we do it as "unto the Lord," (which ought to always be the case), we should remember that He knows and estimates its value far more accurately than we might do.

JOB'S CONFIDENCE IN HIS GOODNESS (vv.18-20)

Because Job had been exemplary in his conduct and his reliability, he had felt quite confident that this prosperity would continue unabated, his days being greatly multiplied and his death one of comfort in his nest (v.18). His root and his branch would be well watered, even in the night (v.19), and the freshness of vibrant life would continue as it had, and his ability for conflict (his bow) would be constantly renewed (v.20). How differently things turned out than he thought! Do we also consider that we may depend on past experience to sustain us for the future? If so, we forget that we are totally dependent on the grace of God always.

RESPECTED FOR HIS KINDNESS (vv.21-25)

Job returns here to speak similarly to what he did in verses 11 to 17, dwelling on the effects that had been produced in his hearers in days past when men listened carefully to him, not interrupting. Nor was this because of a forceful character that demanded men's attention, but because of the apparently gentle wisdom of his counsel (v.21). When he spoke, they had no rebuttal (v.22), for his words were as dew, having a calming effect, rather than as an irresistible storm. Evidently his words were with such weight that men would wait upon his counsel, and when they opened their mouth wide, it was not to speak, but to drink in the counsel Job provided (v.23).

Verse 24 may be somewhat obscure in its meaning, but rather than, "If I mocked at them," J.N.Darby's translation reads, "If I smiled at them when they were without courage." At any rate, Job is speaking of the way he helped those who lacked other help. When people were in confusion, Job was there to choose their way for them (v.25). He even felt himself as a king in the army," able to order matters for the people in a way the people knew was good for them. How unusual a man he was!

CHAPTER 30 - JOB'S PRESENT SHAME

MOCKED BY HIS INFERIORS (vv.1-8)

What a contrast was Job's condition now! Prominent men of dignity had once shown Job every respect, but now young men of what might be considered the lowest class, were making Job the subject of their mockery, - men whose fathers

Job would have disdained to employ to work with the dogs that cared for his flocks (v.1). This reveals another side of Job's character. He spoke before of his delivering the poor and the fatherless and those who had no helpers (ch.29:12). Was it love for them that really moved him? If so, where was his love for this class of people whom apparently he had looked at with contempt? Now they are treating him with contempt, and he feels deeply insulted. Again this shows the pride that Job needed to have broken down, and which was indeed broken down later.

He goes on to describe the sorry condition of these mockers. "Their vigour has perished. They are gaunt from want and famine" (vv.23). Job does not consider that some such people may not be to blame for their condition, but seems to think that, because they are reduced to a state of having to scrounge their food from unhealthy sources (v.4), being driven from men to live in caves or clefts in the valleys (vv.5-6), therefore then were not worth considering. For he says, "they were sons of fools, yes, sons of vile men." Can God not save sons of vile men? Indeed he can, and often does. Ought not Job to have been concerned for others who were so reduced, specially when he himself had been reduced from his previous state?

JOB FEELS THEIR SCORN (vv.9-15)

"They abhor me, they keep far from me; they do not hesitate to spit in my face" (v.10). This was true of men's treatment of the Lord Jesus too, but it did not shake His confidence in the living God. Job considered that, because God had afflicted him, therefore "the rabble" had cast off restraint (v.11) to see in Job an opportunity of venting their evil tempers against him. In fact, this was similar to the Lord Jesus, whose words in Psalm 69:26 surely speak to us, "They persecute Him whom thou hast smitten." How different however was His case from that of Job; for God smote the Lord Jesus on account of our sins. Men, ignorant of such grace, only used the occasion to heap further abuse on the Son of God. If Job at that time had had the example of the Lord Jesus to consider, he might have thought rather differently. But Job allowed himself to be so affected by men's treatment of him that he became virtually unable to look up.

"They break up my path, they promote my calamity." He is evidently thinking of these scorers as intent on throwing him into confusion as to his normal path, and promoting (or increasing) the calamity the Lord had brought upon him. The crushing of this seemed to him like breakers of the sea rolling over him, as swept by a violent storm (vv.13-14). Under such persecution he became terror-stricken, and what prosperity he knew was as a passing cloud (v.15).

JOB'S SOUL POURED OUT (vv.16-19)

In these verses Job describes the agony of his suffering with his soul poured out, his very bones seeming to pierce him in the night, with unabated pain (vv.16-17). His garment, rather than being a becoming adornment, had become disfigured because his body was emaciated, so that the collar of his coat was ill-fitting.

But he no longer talks now of the persecution of callous men: rather, he attributes his sufferings to God, saying, "He has cast me into the mire, and I have become like dust and ashes" (v.19). It is good that he recognises that whatever suffering he may have and from whatever source, yet God is the One who has allowed it. But Job ought to have realised that God would not allow it if it was not going to be of pure blessing to Job in the end. Later he did realise the truth of Romans 8:28, "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." But at the moment he was so overwhelmed by his calamity that he would not give God credit for being who He is.

JOB FINDS NO HELP FROM GOD (vv.20-23)

What seems the most devastating misery for Job is that he considers God is against him. He cries to God but is not heard (v.20). Of course God heard him, but God answers only at the right time and in the right way. Had God become cruel to him? He thought so, but it was the love of God that delayed an answer. What he considered God's hand strong against him was really the strength of God's love for him.

"You lift me up to the wind"(v.22), that is, God was exposing Job to the cruel winds of circumstances, and had therefore thwarted any possibility of success for the poor sufferer. All he could look for now was the pain of death (v.23) which he speaks of as "the house appointed for all living." This fact itself ought to have calmed him to realise that his case was not absolutely unique: others were appointed to the same end.

COMPLETE MISERY (vv.23-31)

Would God deal harshly with a heap of ruins? Job hardly thought this would be the case, yet he felt himself to be only that (v.24). Why should he continue to be troubled? Did he deserve such treatment as this? Why, he had "wept for him who was in trouble, and his soul had been grieved for the poor" (v.25). It is sad that Job was virtually claiming to have been more considerate than God was! Why did he allow such words to fall from his lips?

He looked for good as a result of his apparent goodness, but evil came to him (v.26), and darkness came rather than light. But we can never enjoy the light of God's presence when we maintain our own self-righteousness. No wonder then his heart was in turmoil, unable to rest (v.27), and he had no expectation of anything but "days of affliction." He felt he had sunk as low as the animals, jackals and ostriches (v.29), but he was still speaking as a man! What music he had enjoyed was now turned into mourning and weeping.

CHAPTER 31 - JOB'S STRONG SELF-DEFENCE

Though Job's misery was complete, he returns in this chapter to the defence of his whole life, which was comparatively more virtuous than that of any other man. God had said this to Satan long before (Job 1:8), so that there is no reason to doubt what Job says of himself, though he did not realise that the very fact of his declaring his own goodness was really sinful pride.

JOB'S CLAIM OF MORAL UPRIGHTNESS (vv.1-12)

He says he had made a covenant with his eyes (v.1). That is, he had purposed he would not be seduced by what his eyes observed. He would evidently look away from anything that might be tempting. For he recognised that God above knew every thought of his heart, for the Almighty was high above Job (v.2). Destruction was not properly for Job therefore, but for the workers of iniquity (v.3). Job was conscious of the fact that God observed his ways and the details of every step (v.4).

He insists, if he is suspected of walking in falsehood or practising deceit, let him be weighed in honest scales (vv.5-6), for God would thus be persuaded of Job's integrity. So confident was Job, that he could declare that if he had stepped out of the way or his heart had followed his eyes, if his hands were soiled, then let another eat what Job sowed, in fact, let harvest be totally rooted up (vv.7-8).

Again, he insists that if his heart had been enticed by a woman or if he had taken the initiative in going to his neighbour's house with motives of evil, then let his wife leave him and choose another. "For," he says, "That would be wickedness; deserving of judgment. For that would be a fire that consumes to destruction, and would root out all my increase" (vv.11-12). He was firmly decided as to the wickedness of such things, though his thoughts were contrary to large numbers of careless people today.

KINDNESS AT HOME AND ABROAD (vv.13-23)

Had Job despised the cause of any of his servants, whether male or female? (v.13). If this were true, he asks, what should he do when God raised the

question with him? For God made these servants just as He had made Job. This fact had been considered by Job long before, we are sure, so that he was not guilty of oppressing the creatures of God (vv.14-15).

In verses 16-21 he speaks of sins of omission also. If he had not helped the poor or had ignored the plight of the widow, but had kept all he had for himself, so that the fatherless were left hungry; if he had seen anyone perish for lack of clothing or any poor man without covering; if the heart of the poor had not blessed Job, not being warmed by the fleece of his sheep; if Job had not championed the cause of the fatherless in the gate, the place of judgment; then he says, "let my arm fall from my shoulder, let my arm be torn from the socket" (v.22). In contrast to this, notice his words in parenthesis (v.18), "But from my youth I reared him (the fatherless) as a father, and from my mother's womb I guided the widow."

He ends this section by showing that the fear of God was a vital matter with him (v.23). It was a terror to him to even think of the reality of God's destructive power against evil, so greatly so that he would not dare to offend One whose magnificence filled him with awe to the point of his saying, "I cannot endure."

REFUSAL OF EVERY FORM OF IDOLATRY (vv.24-28)

Was Job showing kindness to the poor in order to gain some material benefit for himself? He thoroughly repudiates this thought in these verses. Though his wealth was great, yet he had not made gold his idol (vv.24-25). He did realise the danger when riches increased, of setting his heart on them, for covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5). If he had any such motives, only God knew these fully, and Job was willing to be examined by God and be judged according to truth.

In contemplating the sun and the moon, had Job been enticed to worship them, as many others are enticed? (vv.26-27). Both of these are amazing objects, but Job looked higher than them and had not even secretly given them honour. He recognised that anything that usurps God's place in the heart is an idol, and if he had been guilty of even secretly allowing this in his thoughts, then this would be iniquity deserving of judgment (v.28), for it would amount to denying the God who is infinitely high above all.

Though Job was no doubt speaking truth, yet there was no reason that he should thus advertise what his character had been. Why did he not stop to consider that God knew his actions, his words and his motives perfectly, and he could wait on God to bring to light the truth concerning His servant?

FRIENDLY AND HOSPITABLE (vv.29-32)

Job speaks now of his attitude toward mankind generally. It was evidently a concern to him that he should not rejoice when trouble came to one who hated him, nor take advantage of such an occasion to profit by the misfortune of such a person (v.29). In fact, he had not even allowed his mouth to sin by asking for a curse on that person's soul (v.30). Actually, this is only normal for one who has faith in the Lord Jesus (Ro.12:20), so that it was no reason for Job to boast. Unbelievers of course acted contrary to this, but we can only expect this from those who do not know the Lord.

Job's close neighbours ("men of my tent") could bear witness that no one was exempt from being provided with food from Job (v.31); and no traveller had to stay in the streets when in Job's vicinity: he was not forgetful to entertain strangers (v.32).

NO HYPOCRISY WITH ITS FEAR OF MAN (vv.33-34)

He was willing to be tested too as to whether he had covered his transgression, as Adam did when using fig leaves, as though this could deceive the Lord (v.33). One might cover his sin because he fears the criticism of the people and the contempt of families, but Job was confident he had no reason for such fear, no reason to hide at home from the eyes of critics (v.34). His life had been open and aboveboard.

A CHALLENGE TO BE HEARD (vv.35-40)

In considering all these things that he felt were to his credit, it is little wonder that Job again bursts into the urgent plea that someone in authority would hear him (v.35), and realises his only hope along this line is in "the Almighty." Why did He not answer Job's desperate cries? If God was taking the place of a prosecutor (which was certainly not so), why had He not written a book dealing with the whole case? Here in early years was the expressed desire for a book written by God! Now we know such a Book is written, not from the viewpoint of a prosecutor, but from that of God being for us, a Book that shows His understanding of everything about us, and has for its object both the glory of God and the greatest good for mankind.

Job says he would carry such a book on his shoulder and bind it to him like a crown (v.36). No doubt he was thinking that a book written by God would be a commendation of Job's character and conduct, but such a view was far from the truth. Such a book of God does commend faithful conduct, but it just as plainly condemns the pride of man, not exalting man at all, but glorifying God. But that same Book declares the greatness of the grace of God in saying the souls of sinful men who turn in true repentance to God and accept the salvation that is in

Christ Jesus. How worthwhile indeed that we should carry the Word of God on our shoulders, and have it as a crown to adorn our heads!

In verse 37 Job says, "I would declare to Him the number of my steps; like a prince would I approach Him." But God did not need Job to declare the number of his steps to Him: He knew them far better than Job did. Nor did Job, when he actually met God, approach Him "like a prince." Rather, he took his rightful place in saying, to God, "Behold, I am vile" (ch.40:4). In other words, he approached God "as a sinner;" then God later gave him the place of a prince.

A FINAL APPEAL AS TO HIS LAND (vv.38-40)

Job has appealed to man and to God, and it seems as though his last appeal is an afterthought, for his land does not seem as important as what he has before spoken of, but he says that even his land, if it had reason to cry out against Job for misusing it, or if he had eaten its fruit without considering its proper needs, would be justified in producing thistles instead of wheat, weeds instead of barley. Of course Job would not say this unless he was confident that he had properly cared for his land. However, this last long discourse of Job was intended to convince his friends that he was not guilty of any of their charges against him, and had reason to be honoured for his many virtues. His friends have no answer.

CHAPTER 32 - ELIHU INTRODUCED

32-37. Elihu's speeches

Ch. 32-33. Elihu's first speech

Ch. 34. Elihu's second speech

Ch. 35. Elihu's third speech

Ch. 36-37. Elihu's fourth speech

Since his three friends have been silenced by Job's strong declaration of self-righteousness, our attention is drawn to a young man who has been a silent observer of this interesting drama. There appears to be no doubt that Elihu is a type of Christ intervening as a mediator rather than as an accuser of Job, nor as a justifier of Job. His name means "My God is Jehovah," and he is the son of Barachel, which means "Blessed of God." Thus he has a strong relationship to God, and what he speaks is manifestly for God.

His anger was aroused both against Job and against his friends (vv.2-3), since Job had justified himself rather than God, and his friends had no answer as to Job's arguments, yet condemned Job. Elihu knew their accusations against Job were unjust, but since he was younger than they, he had waited to allow them time to say all they had to say before he would speak. Thus, the Lord Jesus did not come on the scene until late in the world's history, after men had been given time to declare all their opinions as to the reason for God's allowing suffering even on the part of those who were not guilty of wrongdoing. Questions as to God's dealings had been raised by many, including philosophers, and though discussed from many angles, they were left without any answer. Now the true Mediator between God and men has come, and every question is found resolved in Him, the Lord Jesus Christ.

REASONS FOR ELIHU'S SILENCE (vv.6-10)

Elihu speaks of his being young in contrast to his four hearers, who were "very old" (v.6). For this reason he had not spoken before, thinking he would be thought of as an immature upstart if he dared to speak. For it is perfectly right that "age should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom" (v.7). However, after full opportunity had been given, none of these aged men had found the answer. Must the question therefore remain unanswered?

No! For "there is a spirit in man, and the breath (or Spirit) of the Almighty gives him understanding" (v.8). Eliphaz had appealed to his own observation (ch.4:8). Bildad had appealed to tradition (ch.8:8-9). Zophar was still more ignorant in appealing to his own intuition (ch.11:5,6). These are referred to in 1 Corinthians 2:9: "Eye has not seen (observation), nor ear heard (tradition), nor have entered into the heart of man (intuition) the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." Then it is added, "But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit" (v.10). Elihu recognised this, that God Himself must reveal the truth by His Spirit if man is to know it; and as Elihu said, "there is a spirit in man." God has given man a spirit, and God's Spirit is able to communicate with man's spirit, if only man's spirit is subject to God.

"Great men are not always wise, nor do the aged always understand justice" (v.9). A man may attain greatness in the world, and yet be ignorant of his Creator, or one may have years of experience in the world and still be without the knowledge of God. "The flesh profits nothing." If God is to be understood, this can only be by God revealing Himself (1 Cor. 2:12-14). With this in mind, Elihu can confidently ask his hearers, "Therefore, I say, listen to me, I also will declare my opinion."

THE FAILURE OF THE THREE FRIENDS (vv.11-13)

Elihu had waited patiently while Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar had engaged in their reasonings, paying close attention to all they said, and he would not speak at all until the three friends were silenced and Job too had said his words were ended. Clearly it was true that not one of the three could convince Job or answer the problems he had raised (vv.11-12).

Why had they been silenced? "Lest you say, We have found wisdom" (v.13). God would humble them because of their own pride in thinking they had the answer that escaped Job. They could not vanquish Job, for Elihu says, "God will vanquish him, not man." Elihu knew that Job needed to be vanquished, but not by man, whether the three friends or himself. Whether we realise it or not, we all need to have God gain the victory over us. Only when we allow God this place of absolute authority will our own hearts find true joy and rejoicing.

ELIHU COMPELLED TO SPEAK (vv.14-22)

Elihu reminds them that Job had not directed his words against him, as they had been against his three friends (v.14); and he would not use their arguments against Job. He could see that they were dismayed to the point of having nothing more to say, so that it was perfectly becoming that the younger man could speak now, after waiting until all others were out of words.

Now he will speak, not because he thinks himself wiser than they, but because, being full of words, the spirit within him compelled him to express himself (vv.17-18). If one is led by the Spirit of God to speak, God will give him the words by which others will be affected. He will not need to grope for words, for his inward parts will be so full that he will feel ready to burst (v.19). When one is persuaded he has the message of God, the power of the Spirit of God will fully enable him to give that message.

When Jeremiah was mocked and derided by his people for declaring the word of the Lord, it so affected him that "Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But his word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones: I was weary of holding it back, and I could not" (Jer. 20:9). Thus it is clear too that Elihu, being given a message from God, was not allowed to hold it back. He would find relief only by speaking (v.20).

A vital matter is involved in this: he must not show partiality to anyone, and, if he flattered anyone he considered that this would be cause for his Maker taking him away (vv.21-22). He must give the truth simply and clearly as from God, who is no respecter of persons.

CHAPTER 33

HE SPEAKS AS A MEDIATOR (vv.1-7)

Elihu did not take any haughty and unfeeling attitude as did Job's three friends, but speaks with simple humility, entreating Job to hear and consider what he says (v.1). He claims that his words come from his heart, uttering pure knowledge (vv.2-3), because he is conscious that the Spirit of God has made him, and the breath (or Spirit) of the Almighty gives him life. If you can answer me, set your words in order before me: take your stand" (v.5). This should be true of anyone who speaks for God.

In verse 6 he speaks of himself as Job's spokesman (or daysman), one taking up Job's case before God, not as defending Job's claims, but as concerned for the greatest good of Job's welfare before God. He therefore wants no place of superiority, but speaks of himself as being also "formed out of clay." Job's friends did not think of this when they accused him, for they considered their wisdom superior to his. Elihu did not want Job to be afraid of him, nor would he terrify Job by dreams, as Eliphaz did (ch.7:13-15). "Nor will my hand be heavy upon you" (v.7). This was in contrast to all three of Job's friends.

REFUTING JOB'S COMPLAINT AS TO GOD'S JUSTICE (vv.8-13)

Though speaking kindly to Job, Elihu must also speak faithfully. He does not question how Job had lived, but deals rather with what Job had clearly spoken. Job's friends had heard this, and Elihu also. He therefore faithfully quotes what Job had said, "I am pure, without transgression: I am innocent, and there is no iniquity in me. Yet He counts me as His enemy; He puts my feet in the stocks. He watches all my paths" (vv.9-11). Of course Job could not deny that he had said this, so that Elihu had a firm basis for his message to Job.

"Look, in this you are not righteous. I will answer you, for God is greater than man. Why do you contend with Him? For He does not give an accounting of any of His words" (vv.12-13). Thus Elihu flatly contradicts Job's claim to be righteous. Was it right for Job to judge God? - especially when God is so great that He does not have to give account to man, though man must give account to God. God is always right to act as He pleases without explaining His reasons to man. Since God is sovereign, it is only right for every creature to be always in every circumstance subject to God, not daring to question His righteousness.

TWO WAYS GOD DEALS WITH MAN (vv.14-22)

Since God is invisible, He speaks to man in ways that do not manifest Him personally, but ways that awaken man's serious attention. Two of these ways Elihu now speaks of, first, in verses 15-18, and secondly in verses 19-22.

Though man may not perceive it is God speaking to him yet often God does so "in a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls upon men." At such a time God has a captive audience, whether man wants to listen or not. God spoke to Pilate's wife in this way (Mt. 27:19), though sadly, Pilate did not act on her advice, for he had already trapped himself by his weak vacillation.

In cases of God sending dreams to people, He "opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction" (v.16), not to flatter man's pride, but just the opposite, that is, "to turn man from his deed, and conceal pride from man" (v.17). In other words, if a dream is a warning against what I may be inclined to do, or if it humbles me, then I should take it to heart.

Many unsaved people have been virtually driven by a dream to turn to God from their sins, as verse 18 indicates: "He keeps back his soul from the Pit, and his life from perishing by the sword." Thus, in pure grace God sometimes so shakes a soul by a dream that the person is shocked into turning to God from his sins. Sadly, not everyone will respond to God's appealing in this way.

However, another means of God's speaking is that of inflicting "strong pain," often in one's bed where he cannot occupy himself with many devices that keep him from listening to God (v.19). Sickness and suffering have often driven people to the Lord. One finds himself unable even to eat (v.20), then he loses weight and becomes virtually "skin and bones," with the prospect of an untimely death staring him in the face (vv.21-22). "His soul draws near the pit." Is there any help?

GOD'S RESTORING GRACE (vv.23-30)

Yes, there is help, but only in God, who knows how to send a messenger at the right time, a messenger who is also a mediator, "one among a thousand" (v.23). Such an individual is typical of the Lord Jesus, the "one mediator between God and men" (1 Tim.2:5). He is the One who shows to man God's uprightness, as we see in Romans 4:26, "that He (God) might be just and the Justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." The means of such grace is wonderful, "Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom" (v.24). Elihu could not have understood the full significance of his own words, for we know the ransom is the Lord Jesus Himself in His perfect sacrifice on Calvary for sinners. Job's friends could not think of suggesting a ransom for Job, but the heart of Elihu was overflowing with the conviction that there must be such a ransom since he knew the character of His Creator. The Spirit of God put such words into his mouth. It was not any man who had found the ransom, but God.

Though the flesh of an ailing person has wasted away to almost nothing, yet God's work will restore his flesh like that of a little child (v.25). Of course this is the picture of new birth, a wonderful prospect to place before the eyes of the suffering Job. Could he ever return to the days of his youth? Yes! The grace of God can produce marvellous results.

The freshness of that new life will issue in thankful prayer to God, just as in the case of Saul of Tarsus, who, being awakened and saved by the grace of God, had the distinction of having God say of him, "Behold, he is praying" (Acts 9:11). Such is the result of being born again, "He shall pray to God, and He will delight in him" (v.26). More than that, "he shall see His face with joy," a wonderful honour given to every believer because God has rendered to him His righteousness (v.26). These facts of truth are clearly defined in the New Testament, such as in 1 John 3:2 and in 1 Corinthians 1:30. Our own righteousness is discarded (as filthy rags) and the believer's confidence is now in God's righteousness.

The rendering of verse 27 may be a little uncertain, but it seems that the original King James Version is likely the most correct, "He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not." A real work in the heart of men must begin with God. The individual is moved by the realisation that God is observing him, and he confesses his own sin and perversion with the admission that he has not profited by this. Thus there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. There is an immediate answer from God, "He will deliver his soul from going into the Pit, and his life shall see the light" (v.28). This is certainly because of the ransom that God has found, - in fact the ransom that God has provided, the sacrifice of His own beloved Son. Thus the gospel of the New Testament is anticipated by the words of Elihu, spoken by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This was spoken before the law was given by Moses, yet at that time Elihu assures Job that God worked these things oftentimes with man. Therefore the gospel of God's grace has been always the way of God's meeting the need of man, "to bring back his soul from the Pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living" (vv.29-30). The simplicity of this is beautiful, and Job could have no objection to it.

Nor does God speak only once to a man, but "twice, in fact three times," for we are poor listeners, and God is concerned deeply that souls should be brought back from the Pit, - delivered from the negative horror of being without God, and rather given the positive blessing of being enlightened with the light of life" (v.30).

IS JOB LISTENING? (vv.31-33)

It appears that Elihu has awakened a serious interest in Job, possibly also in his three friends, for none of them reply to Elihu's words. Elihu addresses himself directly to Job, for it was Job who needed an answer for his predicament. Elihu asks him, "Give ear, Job, listen to me, hold your peace and I will speak" (v.31). Elihu desired time to say all that was on his mind, yet he did not demand that he should do all the speaking. Rather, he invites Job, if he has anything to say, to speak it out plainly (v.32), for Elihu was not putting Job down (as his friends did), but desired that Job be justified. He did not mean that Job should justify himself, for this was already Job's tragic mistake, but no doubt he wanted Job to be justified from God's viewpoint, just as the tax gatherer was justified rather than the Pharisee, when he prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" (Lk.18:13-14).

Having asked Job to speak if he had anything to say, Elihu rightly tells him, "if not, listen to me; hold your peace and I will teach you wisdom" (v.33). Job then had nothing to say. No doubt he recognised that Elihu's message was higher than he had considered, and he wisely chose to listen.

CHAPTER 34

HIS APPEAL AS TO WISE MEN (vv.1-4)

Since Job had wisely refrained from speaking, Elihu makes an appeal to all his hearers, as to wise men (v.2). This reminds us of 1 Corinthians 10:15, "I speak as to wise men: judge for yourselves what I say." Having heard Elihu's first words, Job and his friends were wise to listen rather than to speak. They had knowledge enough to know that their knowledge was deficient. But in listening they could test the words of Elihu, a test that he was fully willing that they should make (v.3), just as the taste tells whether food is good or not.

Elihu did not elevate himself above them, however, but appealed to them, unitedly with himself, to choose what is true justice, to "know among ourselves what is good" (v.4). Thus he wisely seeks to draw his hearers to a consensus of opinion.

HE REFUTES JOB'S QUESTIONING OF GOD'S JUSTICE (vv.5-9)

Elihu does not consider at all what the three friends had charged Job with, for they had no basis for their accusations. Rather, Elihu refers to what Job himself had said, "I am righteous, but God has taken away my justice" (v.5). However righteous Job was, it was unrighteous of him to dare to speak of God in this way. Further, Job had said, "My wound is incurable, though I am without transgression" (v.6). Job implied that God had brought him down to a state that

could not be cured, though Job had not been guilty of any transgression (v.6). Because Job had thus spoken, Elihu asks, "What man is like Job, who drinks scorn like water, who goes in company with the workers of iniquity and walks with wicked men?" (vv.7-8).

He does not accuse Job of being wicked, but of speaking like the wicked do against God, and therefore putting himself in their company! "For he has said, it profits a man nothing that he should delight in God" (v.10). In speaking thus, Job did not realise he was inviting further trouble.

JOB'S CHARGE REFUTED (vv.10-30)

Elihu therefore urges them to listen to his answer to Job, again crediting them with sufficient understanding to judge if he was telling the truth (v.10). Then he makes the simple, clear declaration, "Far be it from God to do wickedness, and from the Almighty to commit iniquity." Job ought not to have had the slightest doubt about this, no matter how greatly he may have suffered. Whatever questions may have arisen in Job's mind, the actual fact of truth remains, that "He (God) repays man according to his work, and makes man to find a reward according to his way" (v.11). He does not say when God repays man, for this is a matter that depends on God's inscrutable wisdom; but God will never do wickedly or pervert justice (v.12), as Job had inferred God had done in his case.

Then Elihu asks, "Who gave Him charge over the earth? or who appointed Him over the whole world?" (v.13). He is asking in effect, "Is God answerable to anybody?" Did Job appoint God as the authority over the whole world? If so, of course then God would be answerable to Job! Indeed the opposite is true: Job, and every individual, is answerable to God. In fact, if God so desired, He could "gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath" by which He gives life to all mankind. What would happen then? "All flesh would perish together, and man would return to dust" (vv.14-15). How withering a rebuke to the pride of man! How clearly this tells us that we are always totally dependent on the power of God, not only in creating us, but in constantly, sustaining us in life.

Elihu appeals again to Job and his three friends, "If you have understanding, hear this; listen to the sound of my words" (v.16). He asks them pointedly, "Should one who hates justice govern? Will you condemn Him who is most just?" If one hates justice, he should not be allowed to govern. Would Job suggest this as to God? But God is most just. Even in men's normal relationships it is not fitting to accuse a king of being worthless or a prince wicked (v.18): how much more serious it is to imply that God is not righteous.

"Yet He is not partial to princes, nor does He regard the rich more than the poor" (v.19). Job had been rich, but he should have observed that God did not favour him above others who were poor. In fact, he imagines that God showed partiality by allowing him to suffer rather than others. But this only exposed his lack of discernment. However, all men are "the work of His hands." God is engaged in a very wise work in dealing with every individual.

Men do not have authority over their own lives: in a moment they die, in the middle of the night; the people are shaken and pass away; the mighty are taken away without a hand" (v.20). Whatever man may think or say about this, his utter helplessness is evident. God's eyes see what man does not, for His eyes observe all the ways of man and every step he takes (v.21). Men may seek darkness to hide themselves, but their efforts in this matter are futile (v.22). They love darkness rather than light, but the darkness hides them only from the observation of other men, though they stupidly think they can deceive God.

Samuel Ridout in his book on Job, says the meaning of verse 23 is that "He (God) does not need to study a man's ways, but at a glance, as it were, knows him and enters into judgment with him" (P. 192). "Therefore He knows their works," as without need of patient investigation, and overthrows them, even in the night (v.25), when they think to hide themselves from view, "and they are crushed." This often happens, but only when God decides it. Thus He may strike them in their wickedness in the open sight of others (v.26) rather than in the dark. The reason is immediately given, "Because they turned their back from Him, and would not consider any of His ways" (v.27). This was not true of Job, yet he had spoken in such a way as the wicked speak.

"They cause the cry of the poor to come to Him, for He hears the cry of the afflicted" (v.28). These were those who oppressed the poor.

Did God hear the cry of the poor? Yes indeed! Did God hear the complaints of Job? Job did not think so, but God does hear, and He will answer in His own time and way. Well might Elihu then ask, "When He gives quietness, who then can make trouble?" (v.29). At the moment God had not given quietness to Job, though He certainly did so later. On the other hand, when God hides His face, who then can understand Him, whether a nation or an individual? God does either of these things when He pleases, and submission to Him is the only proper response from man.

Each of these cases is used by God to put the hypocrite in his place (v.30), for a hypocrite would like to have the place of authority, but his thoughts are moved by his feelings, not by faith, so that he is defeated by God's sovereign wisdom in

doing things in a way that does not pamper men's feelings. People then are not snared by the hypocrite if they simply believe God.

THUS, JOB REQUIRED TESTING (vv.31-37)

Elihu indicates that God was testing Job. If Job was failing the test, he must be tested further. Could Job not say to God, "I have borne chastening: I will offend no more; teach me what I do not see; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more?" It was plain that Job did not see the reasons for God's dealing with him. Why not then humbly appeal to God to teach him, rather than criticise God?

Should God repay Job according to Job's terms - just because Job did not approve? (v.33). Elihu therefore tells Job, "You must choose, and not I." It was Job who was being tested. Would he choose to criticise God or to submit to God? Thus, he was invited, "speak what you know." When he criticised God, he did not know what he was talking about, but spoke what he suspected might be the case. How good to remember that the Lord Jesus always spoke what He knew (Jn.3:11).

"Men of understanding" or "wise men" would listen to such advice, and realise that Job had spoken of God without knowledge or wisdom (vv.34-35). Well might Elihu desire that Job might be tried to the utmost because his answers were like those of wicked men (v.36). Job should have known better, for he was not wicked. Yet whatever other sin he might be guilty of, Job was adding to it the serious crime of rebellion against the God of all creation, as though he could withstand God and prosper! (v.37).

CHAPTER 35 - GOD TESTS CONSISTENTLY WITH HIS CHARACTER

Elihu had spoken of God's testing Job (ch.34:36), and in this chapter provides what is true of God's test of mankind. It is clearly connected with chapter 34, but is distinct also, for chapter 34 deals with God's character being vindicated, while now God's character is seen in the way He tests all mankind. There are three divisions in the chapter, the first of which indicates that

Chapter 35

GOD IS INFINITELY GREATER THAN MAN (vv.1-8)

"Do you think this is right? Do you say, My righteousness is more than God's? (v.2). This was very clearly what was implied in Job's words, for he had said he was righteous and God was remiss in His not recognising Job's righteousness. How careful we should be when we are tempted to complain, for we are saying

in effect that God is not treating us rightly! Job had questioned if there was any advantage or profit in being righteous, more than if he had sinned (v.3), that is, he thought, "what is the use of being righteous if the results are not what I imagined thy should be?" How can a believer entertain such unbelieving thoughts?

Elihu answers this by directing Job's eyes to heaven. Just to observe the heavens should make anyone bow with awe at the greatness of the glory of God. Both the heavens and the clouds are "higher than you." The obscurity caused by clouds should move us to realise that it is impossible for mere man to perceive why God deals as He does: His ways are hidden from human observation.

If you sin, what do you accomplish against Him? Or, if your transgressions are multiplied, what do you do to Him?" (v.6). Do men think they can change the truth of God into a lie? Well might God laugh at their foolish impotence!

On the other hand, if one is righteous, does he think he is doing God a favour by this? (v.7). In being righteous, he is not doing more than he should. Why should he expect special recognition? Thus, Elihu levels man's pride to the dust, whether pride in his own rebellious attitude, or pride in his righteous character. It is true enough that a man's actions, bad or good, may affect other people (v.8), but they do not influence God.

Job had recognised before what Elihu insists on here, that his conduct, whether good or bad, did not really influence God. How inconsistent it was therefore that Job would accuse God of unfairness, for he was practically saying that God should make an exception in Job's case because Job was such a righteous man! Unbelief contradicts itself.

WHY IS THERE NO ANSWER FROM GOD? (vv.9-13)

Job was not the only one who suffered what he considered oppression. Elihu knew there were multitudes who cried out for help (v.9), and we know it is the same today. "But no one says, Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night?" (v.10). People do not find help because they cry out (not to God, but) to governments or institutions, or more likely cry out against the government. But God can give songs in the night of man's distress, yet man does not consider this. Elihu is speaking of people generally, not only of Job. Even though God is their Maker, they seem blinded to the fact that He is the only One who can truly relieve them.

Does God not teach us more than the beasts? Does He not give greater wisdom to man than to birds? (v.11). Yet beasts and birds are cared for by God's

preserving mercy. Why does man not consider this and realise that he too is dependent on his Creator? In other words, since God has given greater understanding to men than to beasts and birds, why do men not show it by relying on God?

People cry out, but God does not answer because of the pride that moves them (v.12). The many demonstrations today demanding the people's rights are clearly the expression of man's pride, for in so demonstrating, they are telling the world they are wise and those who oppose are not worth considering, - and even God Himself is given this inferior place. Can they expect God to listen to their empty talk? (v.13). They altogether forget that He is "the Almighty."

THOUGH NOT SEEN, GOD MUST BE TRUSTED (vv.14-16)

Because God is not visible, people excuse themselves from any responsibility toward Him (v.14), but the witness of creation and conscience combine to declare that He is a God of justice, and "you must wait for Him." He does not act when we want it but in His own time He will bring everything into proper perspective, This therefore demands faith.

Job had criticised God for allowing the wicked to prosper while he, a righteous man, was suffering. Therefore Elihu tells him that because God had not in anger punished the wicked quickly, nor had apparently taken much notice of man's folly, therefore Job had opened his mouth in vain criticism (v.16). He had not at least paused to consider wisely what he was saying, and his many words lacked knowledge (v.16).

CHAPTER 36

SPEAKING ON GOD'S BEHALF (vv.1-4)

Elihu continues in the same strain, for as he says, there is much more to be said on God's behalf. Where did Elihu find his knowledge? He fetched it "from afar" (v.3), which would remind us that the Lord Jesus brought the knowledge of God from heaven itself, far above man's ability to produce wisdom. He would ascribe righteousness to his Maker. Job had not done this. Elihu insists that his words are not false, and that One who is perfect in knowledge was with them (v.4). This can be said only of God, and Elihu implied that God was with Job rather than against him.

GOD'S CARE OVER THE RIGHTEOUS (vv.5-7)

Though God is mighty, yet He despises no one. How different than so many "great men" of this world! "He is mighty in strength of understanding." The strength of God is absolute perfection. In the long run, He does not preserve the

life of the wicked, but in contrast He gives justice to the oppressed (v.6). But more than justice, His eyes are upon them for good: He lifts them up to a position of dignity as though on the throne with kings. Today God has set the Lord Jesus on His throne of infinite glory, and every believer is "accepted in the Beloved One" (Eph.1:6), therefore linked with Christ on His throne. Of course Elihu did not understand this, but he realised that God gives believers a position of dignity high above their present circumstances. Job did not understand this, for he was swamped by his circumstances.

GOD'S OBJECT IN SENDING TRIAL (vv.8-15)

But though God delights in blessing the righteous, yet they, as well as the unrighteous, will find themselves subjected to trials, as indeed was true of Job. What does the trial do? It brings out what is actually in the heart. When God allows people to be bound in cords of affliction (v.8), it is with the object of getting their ear, for then He tells them wherein they have transgressed and acted defiantly, which gives people the opportunity to listen and to turn from iniquity (vv.9-10). Job's previous life had not been that of iniquity, but his bold criticism of God was certainly iniquity, little as he realised it.

If they obey and serve Him, they shall spend their days in prosperity and their years in pleasure" (v.11). Was there not, even at this time, opportunity for Job to prove true such blessing as this? Yes indeed, and Elihu desired it for Job. Also Job did eventually experience such prosperity, for he did listen when God spoke to him.

On the other hand, those who failed the test by refusing to obey the Lord would "perish by the sword," if not by a literal sword, then certainly by "the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God." Since they refuse knowledge, "they shall die without knowledge" (v.12).

More serious still is the case of "the hypocrites in heart" (v.13), for "they store up wrath." These are those who pretend to be believers while their hearts are against God. "They do not cry for help when He binds them." When the Lord puts them in a bind, they totally fail the test, for how can a hypocrite honestly cry to the Lord for help? They are defeated by their own hypocrisy, and die in their youth in company with perverted people (v.14). Their foolish choice in life decides their end in death. In contrast, the poor who know how to honestly cry to God are delivered. The affliction and oppression they suffer are the test by which God "opens their ears" to listen to Him.

THE TEST APPLIED TO JOB (vv.16-21)

If Job had not been crushed and resentful concerning this test, Elihu assures him that God would have brought him out of his distresses "into a broad place where there is no restraint" (v.16). Not that Job had completely failed the test, as hypocrites and others had, for God was still testing him. But Job's blessing was hindered by his conception (or misconception) of judgment and justice (v.17).

Is there such a thing as God's wrath? Absolutely! Because this is true, Elihu tells Job to beware lest God might take him away with one blow, and a large ransom would not help to avoid it. He is speaking of a ransom that Job might bring, not of the great ransom God has now provided in the gift of His beloved Son, for when one receives Him as his substitute, His ransom accomplished on Calvary is sufficient to redeem the most guilty.

Had not Job experienced the fact that all his riches and all his prominence could not keep him from distress? (v.19). But he had practically desired the night and oblivion, and Elihu urges him to change his mind as to this, for it was only the cutting off of people in their place (v.20). He did not want Job to fail the test by turning to the iniquity of judging God, for it was this bad fault that Job had chosen, rather than bowing in faith to the affliction that tried him (v.21).

GOD'S GREAT WORKS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS (vv.22-25)

Elihu turns again to speak objectively of the greatness and glory of God, no longer of Job's subjective need, for if God is recognised for who He is, this will have vital effect on how one responds. Being absolutely all-powerful, God must have the place of highest exaltation; and therefore who else could possibly teach as He does? (v.22). On the one hand, who has ever given God an assignment? Or on the other hand, who can dare to tell Him He has done wrong? (v.23). Only contemptible pride could ever have such an attitude.

Whatever God does, it is worthy of our profound respect. "Remember to magnify His word" (v.24). People have rightly composed songs to celebrate what God has done. As to creation, "everyone has seen it". Man is a spectator who ought to be profoundly impressed by the wonders of creation (v.25).

THE WONDER OF CLOUDS AND RAIN (vv.26-29)

God is infinitely greater than human intellect can ever comprehend, "nor can the number of His years be discovered" (v.26). What an understatement! Elihu illustrates this by reference to God's drawing up drops of water from seas, lakes and rivers and causing them to be distilled into rain (v.27). We know this happens continually, so that the wonder of it does not lay hold of us as it should,

and we easily forget that the power of God is necessary to keep the waters continuously in their wonderful cycle.

It appears likely that as Elihu was speaking the clouds began to drop their load of rain on the earth, pouring "abundantly on men" (v.28). The formation of clouds evidently attracted his special attention. Who understands why they spread out as they do? (v.29). And why was this accompanied by thunder, which is so often the case in a rainstorm? However, is it not the case that God was at this time providing a suitable object lesson for Job?

SIGNS OF GOD'S WORKING (vv.30-33)

All of these things are evidences that there is far more than "happen stance" involved in changing weather, etc. The light scattered under the whole heaven is significant of God's giving light as He pleases. "The depths of the sea" (v.30) speak of what is unfathomable to man, yet God covers this: He controls all that is in the seas, which is typical of the nations (Rev.17:15), and by His perfect wisdom He judges the peoples, - that is, all nations. At the same time He gives food in abundance (v.31), yet men in their haughty self-sufficiency give Him no credit for the amazing abundance of food that He provides for them.

"He covers His hands with lightning" (v.32). The sharp, searing flashes of lightning are no mere unexplained occurrences, but the work of the hands of God. Man can certainly not duplicate this, nor command the lightning where it should strike. God does this, for lightning does not just happen to strike where it does.

"His thunder declares it" (v.33). If man ignores what one of his senses (his sight) witnesses, God appeals to another of his senses (his hearing) by sending His thunder, which is sometimes so tremendous as to shake the very ground. Even animals (cattle and many others) are strongly affected by it, and only a cold-hearted, ignorant rebel against God can dare to reject such a sign of the Creator's intervention in the affairs of His creatures.

CHAPTER 37

MAN'S IMPOTENCE IN THE STORM (vv.1-5)

As the storm breaks upon them, Elihu himself trembles (v.1). The thunder of God's voice calls for man's close attention and His lightning spreads over the whole visible area (vv.2-3). "After it, a voice roars. He thunders with His majestic voice" (v.4). "God thunders marvellously with His voice: He does great things which we cannot comprehend" (v.5). Here before Job's eyes was an object lesson concerning the spiritual storm he had experienced. He could

certainly not stop the storm, yet God would allow it only temporarily. He knows how to make the storm a calm (Ps.107:29), as the Lord Jesus did when His disciples were torn with fear (Mk.4:38-39).

GOD'S WAYS IN WINTER (vv.6-9)

Though it was likely not snowing at this time, Elihu brings to bear another feature of the weather that God provides sometimes to speak to man's heart and conscience. He tells the snow or the rain when to fall on the earth, sometimes a gentle rain, sometimes a fierce rainstorm (v.6). Men have tried in many ways to control the weather, - a foolish, futile endeavour for they do not want to allow God to have His way. All of these things were intended to appeal to Job as regards the unpleasant circumstances he was enduring. Would Job not allow God to have His way? Thus the storm was a most important object lesson for him.

MAN'S HAND SEALED (vv.7-10)

Whatever man tries to do about it, God sends such weather as to seal the hand of every man, that everyone will know His work as infinitely greater than theirs (v.7). The beasts take refuge in dens, whether to hide from the wind or the thunder and lightning (v.8). From the south comes the whirlwind and cold from the north. Ice comes from the breath of God, - air that God sends in a cold state (vv.9-10).

STORMS AND THEIR VARIOUS EFFECTS (vv.11-16)

Thick clouds are saturated with moisture, and the clouds whirl as propelled by the wind. But all this is by the guidance of God, directed as He commands (v.12). He causes the rain to fall for three express reasons, - for correction, which man needs often; for His land, - which requires rain if it is to bear fruit; or for mercy, - at times when His creatures suffer from drought. If there is an excess of rain, no doubt this is intended for man's correction. "Praise the Lord fire and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, fulfilling His word" (Ps. 148:7-8). If Job had realised this, it might have saved him some deep soul distress.

Elihu urges Job to stand still and consider the wondrous works of God. Since Job thought he knew how the Lord should act toward him, did he know when and how God dispatched the rain and even caused the dark cloud to shine as light? Did he know the balancings of the clouds" (v.16) - a lesson as to God's balancing the clouds of Job's suffering in a way that Job would never have thought of. But these are works of Him who is perfect in knowledge."

ELIHU'S BEAUTIFUL CONCLUSION (vv.17-24)

"Why are your garments hot when He quiets the earth by the south wind?" (v.17). There are times of quietness and warming instead of bitter cold. Why? In fact, Job had before had the experience of summer warmth, and now was experiencing winter cold in his personal life. He had taken the warmth for granted and when the bitter cold came, he questioned why? Elihu tells him in effect that he should ask why he had experienced the pleasantness of summer warmth. Indeed, when these extremes happen is a question no-one but God can answer.

Again, had God required Job's help in spreading out the skies, strong as a cast metal mirror? (v.18). Indeed the skies are just one more example of the miraculous power of God by which He seeks to turn our eyes heavenward while taking the place of total submission to One who is so high above us.

Could Job teach his friends (including Elihu) what to say to God for Elihu himself acknowledges that he can prepare nothing to say "because of the darkness" (19). For God's ways are enshrouded in darkness until He reveals Himself. In other words, let God speak first before I dare to lift my voice.

"Should He be told that I wish to speak?" (v.20). Job had indicated this in chapter 23:3-4, saying he would present his case to God, filling his mouth with arguments. Did he do so when God finally spoke to him? No indeed! Rather, he said, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth" (ch.40:3-4).

"Even now men cannot look at the light when it is bright in the skies." Even though the light is bright, oftentimes men cannot see it because of the clouds, as was the case with Job. God comes from the north, the direction of mystery, yet in golden splendour, for His majesty is awesome and His greatness unsearchable. He is Almighty and we cannot discern His greatness. His power excels all that might be advanced from any direction (v.23). His judgment is supreme in wisdom, His justice pure and untainted by any questionable consideration. He does not in any way oppress, as is the case with practically every government of men, to some degree at least.

"Therefore men fear Him; He shows no partiality to any who are wise of heart" (v.24) . Whether Job or his friends, all of whom considered themselves wise, their wisdom did not impress God, and he showed no partiality to any of them, as they may have hoped He would. All men everywhere have serious reason to fear God, and indeed to tremble in His presence.

Thus Elihu had spoken simply for God, and in this he is a type of the Lord Jesus, the one Mediator between God and men.

It has been remarked that Eliphaz in his effort to comfort Job presented his own observation as a conclusive witness that he was right in what he said (Ch. 4:8). Bildad, in following Eliphaz, appealed to the tradition handed down from older men as being reliable witness. Then Zophar virtually told Job that he was right because his own intuition told him so! All this was vain. Elihu alone insisted that mankind is totally ignorant of God unless God reveals Himself. Now God can speak!

CHAPTER 38 - THE LORD HIMSELF SPEAKING (Ch.38-41)

38:1-42:6. God's discourses to Job

38:1-40:5. God's first discourse to Job

40:6-42:6. God's second discourse to Job

Marvellously, God Himself directly intervenes in this discussion so early in the history of man. The storm that had been brewing as Elihu spoke becomes a whirlwind, and God spoke to Job out of the whirlwind. Job had felt his whole life to be in the vortex of a whirlwind, but he little realised that God was speaking in the very troubles he faced, therefore God spoke directly to him. This was miraculous, of course, and there was no possibility that Job would not listen.

It may seem amazing that God would take time to speak to one man in the presence of only a few others when the message He gave was so wonderful that all mankind should benefit by it. However, it was not necessary to speak to large numbers, for the complete record is given in writing for the benefit of every person who will read it, from that time in early history throughout all succeeding history. Who could dare to question the magnificent wonder of these words directly from God in chapters 38 to 41? How well it is for us to take this message deeply to heart.

Are His words too philosophic to understand? Not at all! This is no treatise on theological mysteries, but a plain appeal to simple honesty, concerning the evident facts of God's creation. It surely puts man in his place, for it gives God His true place of Creator and Sustainer of all the universe. How well worth our serious meditation are all the details of which God speaks to Job.

GOD'S CALL TO JOB (vv.1-3)

It should be very clear to everyone that God is not speaking to Elihu, but that He confirms what Elihu had said as He answers Job directly (v.1). Most of what God says is in the form of questions. His first question is, "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge," (v.2) - in other words, "Who do you think you are, Job?" Job's words lacked the knowledge he ought to have had, and God will deeply impress this upon him.

"Now prepare yourself like a man: I will question you, and you shall answer Me" (v.3). God expects Job to take only a man's place, and the questions God asks are simple enough for a man to understand, though Job would find himself helpless to answer such questions.

QUESTIONS AS TO GOD'S WORKS OF CREATION (vv.4-38)



Job, a rich man, possessed donkeys, sheep and camels.

This section is divided into seven parts, beginning with

THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE EARTH (vv.4-7)

"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" (v.4). Does the earth have foundations? - an earth that revolves in space with nothing to hold it up? Yes, it could not even exist without a fundamental basis of truth, but could Job explain this? Can anyone today explain it? No! For one thing, none of us was present when God laid these foundations, and who can understand anything

about the way that creation came into existence? "For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast" (Psalm 33:9). The earth's foundations and earth itself were created at the same instant, simply by the Word of God.

"Who determined its measurements? Surely you know!" (v.5). Of course Job knew that only God could do this. "Who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened?" (v.6). Certainly the foundations of the earth are not fastened to anything visible to us.. Whether Job knew this at that time or not, he could certainly not answer God's question. When man builds he must have a foundation fastened to something solid, but what of God's building? Man too requires a corner stone. Who laid the corner stone for God's building?

[Creation of Angels]

At the creation of earth "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." There is no doubt the sons of God are angels (ch.1:6), who were therefore created before the earth was. If "the morning stars" are literal stars, then the stars too were created before the earth was, it may be objected that Genesis 1: 16 seems to indicate that God made stars on the fourth day of the refurbishing of the earth, but when we are told, "He made the starts also," this is likely not chronological, but a notice of a creation prior to the history of the fourth day. We may question if literal stars can sing, but science has told us that there is a harmony of sound emanating from the stars. At least there was a great celebration among God's creatures when He created the earth.

HIS CONTROL OF THE SEAS (vv.8-11)

"Who shut in the sea with doors?" (v.8). God is not speaking here of the original creation, but of His separating the waters above from the waters beneath (Gen.1:6-7). For the earth was at first covered with water, then the waters were separated and the dry land appeared. As the Word of God caused the appearance of the land, so His Word caused the waters to be gathered "into one place" (Gen.1:9).

As to the seas being gathered together into one place, it is a known fact that all the seas are connected, which is not true of the lands. But this tremendous body of waters, always in motion, often surging in mighty waves, so that man is helpless before its raging, is yet under the perfect control of the Creator. He says, "I make clouds its garment, and thick darkness its swaddling band." Yet how good to read in Psalm 93:4, "The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, than the mighty waves of the sea."

This is beautifully confirmed in verses 10 and 11: "I fixed My limit for it and set bars and doors, when I said, 'This far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop.'" People may speak of "natural laws" as causing this phenomenon, but who is the Author of natural law?

How striking is the spiritual significance of God's control of the seas! Job felt as though the waves of the sea were engulfing him in the succession of painful tribulations that seemed to be uncontrolled. Believers may pass through times of turbulent unrest and distress as though tossed by the waves of a rolling sea, but God is in perfect control of all this, and is able to quiet the sea immediately, just as the Lord Jesus did when His disciples were so alarmed: "He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace, be still:' and the wind ceased and there was a great calm" (Mk. 4:39).

THE DAY DISPLACING THE NIGHT (vv.12-15)

Did Job decide when the morning was to dawn? (v.12). What a question for the man who thought he could practically make God accountable to him! The morning always follows the night, and what man can change this amazing fact? Job had been feeling the darkness of night in the hard experiences he had suffered. If he could command the morning, then he could bring complete relief to the trials of darkness. But only God can cause the dawn to know its place.

Verse 13 reminds us that when the millennial day dawns it will embrace "the ends of the earth," and the wicked will be shaken out of it. The wicked, who love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil, will at that day be exposed by the light of "the Sun of righteousness" arising with "healing in His wings." The Lord Jesus, the true Light, will so expose the wicked as to shake them out of the earth.

As to verse 24, Samuel Ridout writes, "As the marks of the signet ring upon the formless day, so the light stamps upon the face of the earth the varied forms and colours of all things. They stand out like a lovely garment - or the reverse, a scene of ruin - under the light. The light shows all things as they are" (The Book of Job - S. Ridout - p.227).

Because the wicked love darkness, then light is withheld from them (v.15), and their arm, upraised in opposition to God, is simply broken. Job should certainly have been deeply impressed by this, for he had been dangerously close to raising his arm in opposing God, and in this way acting as the wicked do.

THINGS UNFATHOMED, UNMEASURED (vv.16-21)

Now God asks Job if he had entered the springs of the sea or walked in search of the depths (v.16). We are told that the insect population of the world is far greater in weight than all the human and animal population - though it would require quite a number of mosquitoes to equal the weight of one elephant! But all the population of earth -human, animals, insects and birds - are nothing compared to the population of the seas, for the seas are populated in all areas and at every level. Job had no idea of what was unseen beneath the surface of the seas.

Had the gates of death been opened to him? (v.17). Of course the seas have swallowed countless millions of people (including those drowned in the flood of Noah's day); but apart from this, did Job understand where death had taken those who had been claimed by it through all the years?

"Have you comprehended the breadth of the earth? Tell Me, if you know all this" (v.18). At that time, no doubt Job did not know the earth was formed as a tremendous ball rotating in space. But even today, though we are told the earth is 25,000 miles in circumference, who can possibly comprehend the greatness of this? Though scientists have learned a great deal about God's creation, yet the more they learn, the more evident it becomes that their ignorance is far greater than their knowledge.

"Where is the way to the dwelling of light? And darkness, where is its place?" (v.19). God had said, "Let there be light" on the first day of the remaking of the earth (Gen.1:3), before the sun was set in its place on the fourth day. Some scientists have considered that the sun was the source of light, but further searching has persuaded them that there is light apart from the sun. Where does it come from? We do not know any more about this than Job did. Thus, the origin of light or the origin of darkness are matters of which mankind is totally ignorant.

Could Job take the light or the darkness back to its original place of dwelling? (v.20). The very question would not have arisen in men's minds, but God raises it simply to show how greatly man's knowledge is limited. The irony of verse 21 is striking. Was Job born when light was introduced? Had he lived so many years? Of course these words of God are simply intended to put Job in his place.

THE ELEMENTS (vv.22-30)

The Lord now turns to bring to Job's attention the many elements of the weather, which continually affect people in various ways, - the snow, hail, wind, rain, frost and dew. Amazingly, every snowflake (of which there are trillions) is

beautifully designed in a pattern of six points, yet none have ever been found to be identical to another! Snow provides a cover for earth in winter to protect the ground from freezing deeply. In the snow there are treasures of which Job was totally ignorant, and similarly in the hail. While the snow may be for protection, the hail is reserved for times of trouble, battle and war. Both snow and hail are frozen water, but how different they are when falling on earth!

Man likes to think of himself as in control of things, but can he control the snow or the hail or the wind? (vv.22-24). Verse 24 inserts the matter of the way in which light is diffused before speaking of the east wind. For Job was to realise that the light of God was involved in all His actions, and just as definitely at work when He sent His east wind of strong adversity. God's ways had really been darkness to Job, so he did not understand the way God was diffusing His light.

Who has divided a channel for the overflowing water, or a path for the thunderbolt, to cause it to rain on a land where there is no one?" (vv.25-26). Sometimes the rain causes overflowing floods, sometimes even where there are no inhabitants, yet also sometimes where the inhabitants are greatly affected by it. But God's work is not confined to the needs of humans, little as we may understand these things. Our mere human thoughts centre around ourselves, which is only unseemly pride. God's thoughts are infinitely higher than we naturally imagine (Isa.55:8-9).

"Has the rain a father? Or who has begotten the drops of dew?" (v.28). Where and when the rain falls may seem to us totally haphazard, but it is dependent simply on the will of our God and Father, who never makes a mistake. Similarly, frost is always sent by Him in perfect wisdom for every occasion (v.29). How it is possible for water to harden like stone is only explained by God's law in sending the cold (v.30). Who really understands this?

THE HEAVENLY BODIES (vv.31-33)

Job had spoken of "the Bear, Orion and the Pleiades" (ch.9:9), so that he knew something of astronomy. The Lord draws his attention first to the Pleiades, meaning "the heap of stars," asking if Job can "bind the chains of the Pleiades." Astronomers discovered "that the whole solar system is moving forward around Alcyone, the brightest star in the Pleiades" (Fausset's Bible Encyclopaedia - p. 576). While the planets revolve around the sun, the sun and all the planets revolve around Alcyone at the rate of 422,000 miles per day! Such are the chains (or "binds") of the Pleiades that captivate the whole solar system. Could Job bind such influences? Or could he loose the belt of Orion, the force that

keeps Orion in its orbit? Could he bring out Mazzaroth (the constellations of stars) in their proper season? Could he guide the Great Bear with its cubs?

Thus the stars of the heavens were a matter of common knowledge at this early date in history, and the names have remained the same. But did Job know the ordinances God had established in the heavens? Did he even understand the relationship the stars had to the earth, let alone being able to set those stars in places of dominion over the earth? Astrologers try to correlate the movement of the stars with the events of earth, but their efforts only expose their utter ignorance.

HOW ARE CLOUDS CONTROLLED? (vv.34-38)

These verses conclude the first section of God's answer to Job, for it is clear that chapter 39 should begin with verse 39 of chapter 38. He had spoken of the rain in verses 25-28, now He adds a question as to whether Job could give orders to the clouds to drop their water when Job desired it (v.34). We may see the clouds dark and heavy and think at such a time that we could tell the clouds to pour out their rain, but it may be that no rain falls at all. Lightning may trigger a rainfall, but who can send the lightning? (v.35). If man does have any wisdom at all, who has put it in his mind? Is he to have the credit for this? Or does he manufacture his own understanding? (v.36). If one thinks he is wise, let him number the clouds! They are so constantly changing and on the move, often amazing in their magnificence, that we are wise simply to observe and marvel at the display they present, rather than to think of numbering them. May such lessons deeply impress us.

GOD'S CARE FOR HIS CREATURES (ch.38:39 to 39:30)

THE BEASTS OF PREY (vv.38-41)

God is not only infinitely great, but He has a heart of kindness and care for all His creation. In this section He begins with the beasts of prey, with which we should not likely begin, for we think of them as needing no outside care for they are predators. But they require the care of God as do all other creatures. God has made them as they are and provides for them in the fact of their being able to hunt their own food. Who would think of hunting food for them, at least while they are in the wilds? "The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their food from God" (Ps. 104:21).

Even Satan (who is spoken of as "a roaring lion" - 1 Pet.5:8) is dependent on God for his very existence. It was Satan who implied to Eve that God was not good in withholding from her and her husband the fruit of the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3: 1); yet Satan has himself benefited by God's goodness since the time of his creation.

The raven is a bird of prey (v.41), but if God did not provide the prey for them and their young, how could they continue to exist? Interestingly, it is said here, "its young ones cry to God." Whether intelligently or not is not the question, but God recognises their cry. If so, did God not hear the cry of Job? Of course He did, though He did not answer Job at just the time and in the way that Job thought He ought to.

CHAPTER 39

THE WILD GOATS AND THE DEER (vv.1-4)

The Lord now turns Job's attention to animals not in the least aggressive, the wild goats and the deer. Indeed, rather than aggressive, they are elusive. Did Job understand all about them? - when they bear their young, how many months of gestation, etc. How much Job knew at the time we do not know, but even though there is more general knowledge of these things now, how many people know by practical experience with the animals themselves all about such matters? Why also do the young grow strong quickly, then leave their parents, not to return?

While man does not care for these animals, God does; and if God cares for these climbers of the rocks, how much more does He care for humans who have the adversity of difficulties that may seem insurmountable? Let Job consider this well.

THE WILD DONKEY (vv.5-8)

The wild donkey is a totally different type of creature, found mainly in the plains or wilderness. Man just does not control the habits of this animal that is 'free as the breeze.' Though living in "the barren land," he is somehow sustained by God in finding food. He avoids the tumult of the city and is not like the tame donkey that must obey the direction of a driver.

The lower ranges of the mountains (not the rocks) supply his pasture, where he may find green vegetation. Would men have even thought of creating an animal like this? But in some respects Job was like the wild donkey, - independent, rebellious, wanting his own way. Thus, he had another object lesson to consider.

THE WILD ANTELOPE (vv.9-12)

The wild ox is understood to be a large antelope that is untameable. Can its will be subdued by men as domesticated cattle are, so that it willingly serves the

authority of man? (v.9). Would it willingly lie down in a manger where cattle are quite content? Could Job make it to plod in a furrow, pulling a plough as oxen were taught to do? (v.10). The strength of the antelope was more than sufficient for this, but how could man make use of such strength? Could he trust such an animal to bring home grain from the field? (v.12). Of course the answer to all these questions is negative, but this serves to teach us that there is much diversity in God's creation that is beyond man to even understand, and to show up man's limitations in contrast to God's unlimited resources. Job was in need of lessons like this, as no doubt all mankind is.

THE OSTRICH (vv.13-18)

The ostrich is another most interesting creature of God, - a bird, but not a flying bird, using its wings only to help it run at a fast rate. Also, unlike other birds, she makes no comfortable nest in which to lay her eggs, and to hide them from predators, but leaves them in the ground, warming them in the dust, in places where beasts or men may walk, not considering that these eggs are in danger of being easily broken (vv.14-15).

Also, she treats her young harshly, as though they were not hers (v.16). How unlike most mother birds or animals! Why is this so? "Because God deprived her of wisdom, and did not endow her with understanding" (v.17). Sad to say, some human mothers act like the ostrich in this matter, but it is abnormal. But Job was to learn from the ostrich that God does not do what man might naturally expect, nor does God need to give us His reasons. The speed of the ostrich also is amazing, far exceeding the speed of a horse (v.18). Why? Because God chose to make it this way.

THE HORSE (vv.19-25)

The Lord now turns to consider the horse, a domesticated animal, having great strength and remarkably fearless, yet controlled by his rider. Had Job given such strength to this amazing creature? (v.19). Or could he frighten him? (v.20). It is a war horse particularly in this case, an animal that "gallops into the clash of arms" (v.21). He does not shy away from danger, but rushes right into it. Swordsmen opposing him do not slow him down (v.22). The spear and the javelin mean nothing to him, but the clash of arms seems only to increase his fierceness and rage (v.24). Though he is not a wild animal, when engaged in war, he seems to have the qualities of the wildest of animals. The sound of the trumpet does not stop him, but spurs him on (vv.24-25): as long as the noise and shouting of the battle continues, he continues his advance.

Again, this is another creature that man would not have thought of creating, specially any man who was a lover of peace, and Job is faced with this as another object lesson to tell him God is greater than Job.

THE HAWK AND THE EAGLE (vv.26-30))

The Lord here returns to consider two creatures that prey on others. Was it Job who decided the hawk should fly southward when winter approaches? (v.26). Of course scientists would say it is by instinct that birds migrate to a warmer climate. But polar bears, for instance, do not have this instinct, nor do penguins. Who gave this instinct to some birds? Only their Creator. It is certainly not lack of food that moves them, for they leave the northern areas even when food is plentiful. Jeremiah 8:7 speaks of some birds, "The stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming."

Job is told to consider the eagle too. Did Job command it to rise in flight to tremendous heights of the mountains? (vv.27-28). In fact, if man in being created, had never seen a bird, would it even enter his mind to create such a creature? From the highest heights the eagle observes its prey (v.29), having amazing eyes that see a small creature from the greatest distances and descends as rapidly as an arrow to catch its prey and bear it to its young ones in the nest.

Also, "where the slain are, there it is" (v.30). The horse has rushed into the battle, and the eagle follows to feast on the flesh of the fallen. How this reminds us of Revelation 19:17-18: "Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, 'Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great.'" All this tells us that God has a means of carrying out His judgments, whether man understands it or not. Job was to learn from this that the One who made the eagle and its penetrating eyes, surely has eyes more keen than the eagle, and His judgments can be fully trusted.

CHAPTER 40

GOD'S CHALLENGE AND JOB'S RESPONSE (vv.1-5)

Job had said that if God would only listen to him, he would present his whole case in showing how God was unfair in His dealings (ch.33:3-5). Therefore now God gives Job opportunity to do this. He asks Job, "Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him? He who rebukes God, let him answer it" (v.2).

Where were Job's arguments then? How withering were God's words to the unseemly pride of Job!

He says, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice, but I will proceed no further" (vv.4-5). Job goes deeper here than apologising for what he has said, for he expresses his judgment of himself personally. Indeed, how true it is that we ourselves, in our sinful nature, are worse than the worst thing we have ever said or done. Then he judges also what he had spoken more than once, and says he lays his hand over his mouth, just as Romans 3:19 says of all mankind, "that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."

GOD'S FURTHER QUESTIONS TO JOB (40:6 - 41:34)

The whirlwind had continued a long time, and is still blowing when the Lord speaks in these verses. The whirlwind itself was intended to impress Job with the fact that every circumstance of swirling troubles and confusion was under the controlling hand of the Creator. "The Lord has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet" (Nahum 1:3).

"Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me" (v.7). These questions of the Lord continue through chapter 41, so that Job's answer is found in chapter 42:1-6. But the Lord had deeper work to accomplish in Job's soul, and His questions probe the depths of Job's heart as Job had never expected to be probed.

The Lord had told Job to prepare himself like a man to answer the questions God would ask. Now He asks him first, "Would you indeed annul My judgment? Would you condemn Me that you may be justified?" How withering are such words! - but Job needed them, for he had inferred that God was unfair, while he himself was righteous! Such pride needed to be brought down to the dust. At least, power was not on Job's side, but with God. Had he an arm like God?. Could he speak in thunder, as God does? Let him adorn himself with majesty and splendour, with glory and beauty, and disperse the rage of his wrath (vv.10-11). God could do this. Could Job? Rather, at the very thought of such power, Job should be impressed with his own utter impotence. But he is further told, "Look on everyone who is proud, and humble him. Tread down the wicked in their place. Hide them in the dust together, bind their faces in darkness. Then I will also confess to you that your own right hand can save you" (vv.12-14) The irony of such words is evident; Job needed humbling himself. How could he even hope to humble others? But there are many proud people today. We are helpless to humble any of them, but God will bring down the pride of everyone to the dust.

Could Job's right hand save him? (v.14). No more than that he could humble everyone who is proud. Job had to learn that only the living God is the Saviour, and that He saves, not those who deserve it but those who are humbled to the dust to recognise they deserve nothing but judgment. God saves by grace, through the great value of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus at Calvary. Of course at that time Job knew nothing of that great sacrifice, but he could still know that he was a sinner, dependent only on the grace of God.

BEHEMOTH, A GREAT LAND ANIMAL (vv.15-24)

Speaking of greatness and power, God draws attention now to a huge animal of great strength, which he calls "behemoth." Some have thought this refers to a hippopotamus, but that animal has a small tail, while behemoth "moves his tail like a cedar" (v.17). Perhaps this animal has now become extinct, for its tail seems to resemble that of a dinosaur. Some think the dinosaurs were destroyed in the flood, others, that some continued after the flood, and later became extinct.

But though behemoth ate grass, like an ox (v.15), his strength was greater than that of the lion, which feeds on meat of other animals. In behemoth every part of his anatomy contributed to his exceptional strength (vv.16-18), his loins, his body, legs and bones and even his tail. Strikingly, we are told, "he is the first of the ways of God" (v.19). God has created him as an object lesson for us of resistless strength. Only the God who made him can bring him down to nothing, symbolically to subject him to the judgment of the sword.

God has supplied food for him also (v.20), while he might lie down without fear of anything, though other beasts practically surrounded him. He is the very picture of self-confident power. Even the river may rage while he is at peace (v.23). He drinks in great amounts of water rather than be drowned in it.

Thus, he is untameable and uncontrollable. Man could do nothing with him as he does with an ox or a horse. Also he was totally selfish: he was of no service to any man or animal. Would Job want to be like this, strong and self-confident, with no real object of being of help to others?

The character of behemoth is similar to that of many strong, capable men, men who know how to subdue others, but have no heart to be of help to them. Does this not remind us of 1 John 2:18, "as you have heard that Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come." Behemoth thus seems to be specially symbolical of Antichrist, since he is a land animal, for Antichrist will rise out of the land (of Israel), as Revelation 13: 11 shows us. The first beast of that chapter rises out of the sea (of the Gentile nations), and may well be typified by

leviathan, of Job 41. It is God who has made him, though he refuses to recognise God.

CHAPTER 41

LEVIATHAN (vv.1-34)

Leviathan was a water creature, and appears to be the crocodile, the most fearsome of all aquatic beasts, unless it was another similar animal, now extinct. Job could use a hook to catch fish, but how futile the thought of a hook for a crocodile! (v.1). His jaws and his nose are impervious to any kind of attack (v.2). Could Job persuade him to respond softly to him in order to bring about his submission? (v.4). The very appearance of the crocodile is hostile and intimidating. He would certainly never be tamed to engage in play like some birds or animals, and certainly not as a pet for girls! (v.5). Who would think of trying to obtain his flesh to make a dinner of him? Harpoons were useless against him, for they could not penetrate his outer covering (v.7). If one was bold enough to lay his hand on him, let him remember the battle encountered in any such efforts, and never do it again! (v.8).

The Lord assures Job that any hope of overcoming Leviathan is futile: the very sight of the beast should overwhelm his would-be attacker. No human is so fierce that he would dare to stir up such a creature (v.10). But let us remember it is God who made this beast: Who then could possibly stand against God? Thus we are shown the fearful, untameable character of leviathan, as wild and unapproachable as behemoth, and this reminds us of the first beast of Revelation 13, the beast who rises out of the sea (v.1). Being a water creature, Leviathan evidently symbolises the Gentile power that will arise during the Tribulation period, a revival of the Roman Empire, embracing ten nations who "give their power and authority to the beast" (Rev.17:13). This empire is called the Beast, and the man who rules over it will also be called the Beast. Of him people will say, "Who is like the Beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (Rev.13:4). This Beast, along with the Antichrist, will form a powerful union of such strength that they will not be afraid to challenge their own Creator! While no man can stand before them, however, the Lord will bring them down to a defeat of abject humiliation, and both will be cast alive into the lake of fire (Rev.19:20).

But the Lord says of Leviathan, "I will not conceal his limbs, his mighty power, or his graceful proportions" (v.12). The Lord would not hesitate to describe him exactly as he is, to let us know that the Lord knew him perfectly and took full account of his strength. "Who can remove his outer coat? Who can approach him with a double bridle? Who can open the doors of his face, with his terrible teeth all around? (vv.13-14). Men have captured crocodiles and put them in

large pools of water, but who would dare to get into the same pool, as some do with dolphins?

"His rows of scales are his pride, shut up tightly as with a seal: one is so near another that no air can come between them: they are joined one to another, they stick together, and cannot be parted" (vv.15-17). Thus he is protected as by a coat of armour. The Roman Beast too will employ every means of protecting himself against the attacks of any enemy.

But he will take the offensive also, as does the crocodile. "His sneezings flash forth light and his eyes are like the eyelids of the morning. Out of his mouth go burning lights. Sparks of fire shoot out. Smoke goes out of his mouth" (vv.18-21). Of course this is figurative language, and speaks of the vicious words that proceed from the mouth of the Beast, as we are told of him in Revelation 13:5-6, "He was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven." But the appearance of light, as though the beast brought light and wisdom with him, is a false show. The boastful pride of this man and his ominous threats are strikingly illustrated in the character of Leviathan.

"Strength dwells in his neck" (v.22), for his neck is stiffened in rebellion against God. "And sorrow dances before him" - as though sorrow was trying to clothe itself with spurious joy, yet only to bring misery and wretchedness. "The folds of his flesh" are so joined as to make him invulnerable to attack (v.23), and underneath his heart is as hard as a stone. What a picture of the great champion of infidelity, who will arise because the world has rejected the faithful, gracious Lord of glory, and this beast will think of himself as the saviour of the world!

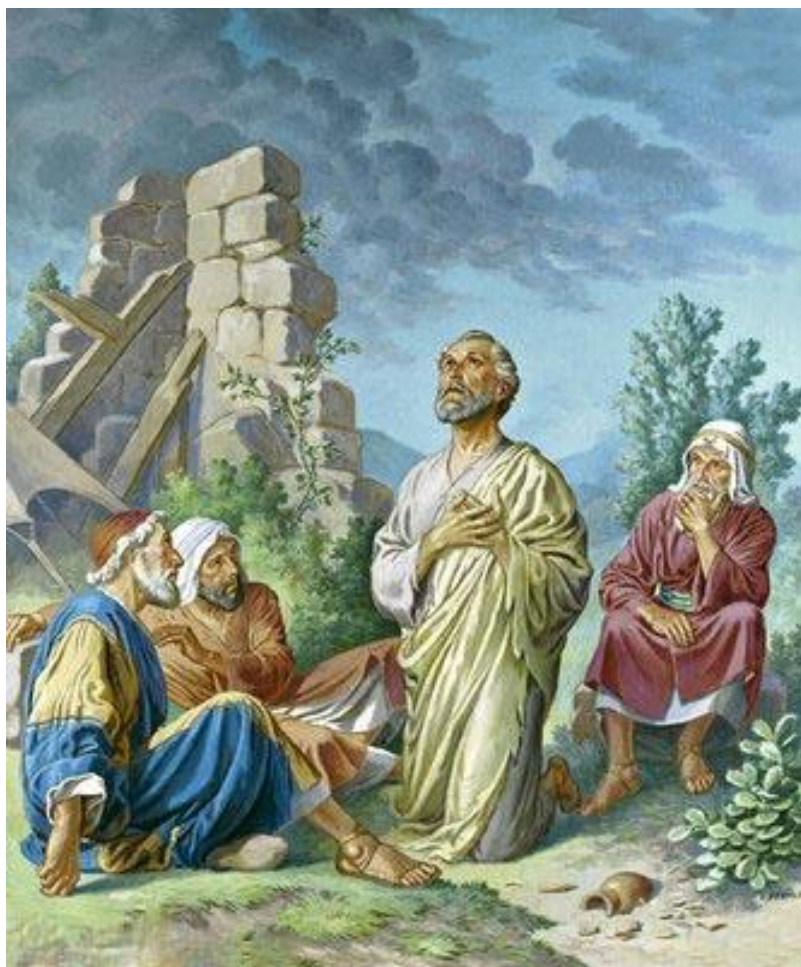
The mighty men of earth will be afraid when this man asserts himself (v.25). Neither the sword, spear, dart or javelin can penetrate Leviathan's armour (v.26), and all men's efforts to defeat the Beast will be to no avail. Iron and bronze weapons, arrows, darts, slingstones and javelins are useless against him (vv.27-29). Underneath too he is equipped to resist attack (v.30).

"He makes the deep boil like a pot; he makes the sea like a pot of ointments" (v.31). As Leviathan stirs up the water, so the Roman Beast will stir up the nations (the sea) in tumultuous trouble. The "shining wake" he leaves behind him tells us that there will be marked results from the Beast's activity.

"On earth there is nothing like him, which is made without fear" (v.33). God has made this creature as a picture of the assumed greatness of the Roman Beast,

who will rise as the champion of mankind in his opposition both to God and to the true welfare of the people. He will aspire to every high thing, a "king over all the children of pride" (v.34).

When this Roman Beast arises, he will be in league with the Antichrist who will erect an idolatrous image in the temple area of Jerusalem in honour of the Beast (Rev.13:14-15). This will be the ultimate peak of man's pride, an arrogant challenge against God. Then the Lord Jesus will meet this challenge in awesome power, and both of these enemies of God will be "cast alive into the lake of fire" (Rev.19:19-20). Such will be the fearful end of him who "is king over all the children of pride." What a lesson for us to learn now to judge our own pride!



CHAPTER 42

42: 7-17. God rebukes Job's friends and restores Job

Verses 7-9. The Lord's vindication of Job

Verses 10-17. Job's fortunes restored

JOBS REPENTANCE AND PRAYER (vv.1-9)

Who would not be totally subdued after hearing God speak such things as He did to Job? What a change took place in Job's attitude and in his words! He was humbled to the dust, as he says, "I know You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You. You asked, Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (vv.2-3). He now realises that his words before had been moved by ignorance of God, who "can do everything." This expression reminds us of Peter's words to the Lord Jesus, "Lord, You know all things" (Jn.21:17). Peter needed to learn the same lesson that Job needed, for Peter too had expressed too much confidence in the flesh when he insisted that he would not deny the Lord Jesus though all others did. Job fully admits to the Lord that he had spoken without knowledge of what he was saying, - things too wonderful for him, that is, he sought to deal with matters that were wonderful beyond his understanding and found himself humiliated.

Now Job speaks because the Lord had told him to answer what the Lord said (v.4). His answer was, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (vv.5-6). Though Job had heard something about the Lord, it was not enough to meet Job's actual need. Now he was brought face to face with the greatness and glory of the Lord, with the result, "I abhor myself." It was not simply a matter of what he had done that he abhorred, but himself. This was the root of what he may have done, and it was this root that God was dealing with, that is, the pride of Job's very character. Every believer needs to be brought down to this very point.

What a contrast was this to the way in which Job had persistently sought to defend himself in all his words to his friends! However strong may be the pride of any person, absolutely everyone will eventually be humbled down to the dust. Unbelievers may all their life persist in this proud arrogance, but after death their humiliation will be all the more traumatic for them. How much better for us to be humbled before God in sober self-judgment before God must bring to bear the humiliation of a person's being cast into the lake of fire!

The Lord had then to deal with Job's three friends, telling them his anger had been aroused against them for what they had spoken when thinking they were speaking for God. They had misrepresented Him, not speaking for Him what was right, "as My servant Job has" (v.7). Job's speaking right of course refers to Job's words to God in verses 2-6.

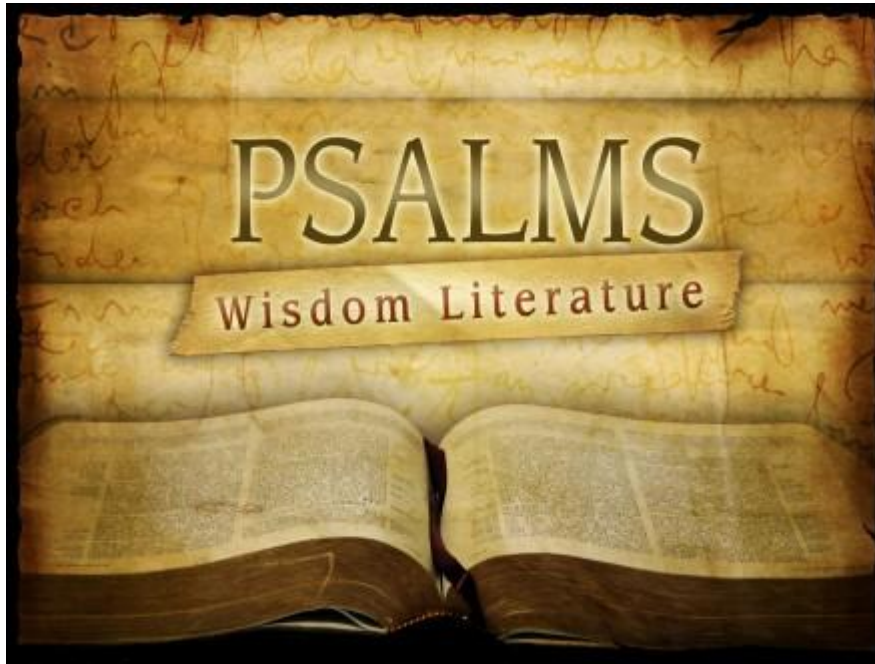
God told these friends to go to Job and in his presence offer up to God a burnt offering of seven bulls and seven rams (v.8) The burnt offering pictures the offering of the Lord Jesus as that which brought glory to God. These friends would be humbled too in thus acknowledging their pathetic failure before Job. But Job was not to reproach them then, but to pray for them, which we may be sure he was glad to do! Apart from a sacrifice God would have to deal with them according to their sin, but He saw fit to use Job as an intermediary and the sacrifice a necessary provision for their forgiveness. In this way God made both Job and his friends to feel the shame of the way they had previously spoken. Job was to pray for them and they were to learn through Job's praying for them that their previous criticism of Job had been totally wrong.

Job's friends obeyed the Lord in this matter, and it is added, "for the Lord accepted Job" (v.9). This is an illustration of James 5:16, "the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much".

JOB'S FULL RESTORATION (vv.10-17)

Wonderful was the result of Job's praying for his friends! Because his attitude was so changed, the Lord restored all his losses, and added much more (v.10), giving him twice as much in possessions as he had previously owned. Of course, he would no longer have his sore boils or other physical afflictions, and his brothers and sister and many previous acquaintances came to him on friendly terms, eating with him and giving him presents of silver and gold. Those who had avoided him became the most friendly. The restoration of his possessions was as rapid as his previous losses had been. The number of his livestock is astonishing. Besides this he was blessed with the same number of sons and daughters he had previously had (v.13). Thus he had twice as many children, though the first ten were then in heaven.

Today those who know the Lord Jesus cannot expect to be blessed with material blessings, but rather are "blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). Job's children too were highly favoured, his daughters being the most beautiful in all the land. After this experience of Job he lived 140 years (v.16), so that perhaps his age at death was similar to that of Abraham (175 years); but believers today are blessed with the knowledge of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.



The Book of Psalms

Introductory Information

The Book of Psalms, in the Old Testament of the Bible, is the largest collection of Hebrew religious poetry; it consists of 150 pieces divided into 5 sections. Originally spoken or sung in various worship settings, the psalms were composed individually from the 10th through the 4th century BC and compiled in their present form by at least 200 BC. Tradition assigns the psalms to King David, but the titles to particular psalms also name Moses, Solomon, Ethan, Asaph, and the sons of Korah as authors. **The psalms are numbered differently in various versions of the Bible.**

Like all Hebrew poetry, the psalms are written in parallel lines that balance word masses, images, and thoughts and have the effect of nuancing and emphasizing the sense through a skilled mixture of repetition and variation. The thought in parallel lines may be repeated, contrasted, or extended and qualified. The same literary devices appear also in Canaanite religious poetry from Ugarit in Syria. It is evident that Israel took over these forms and styles along with the Canaanite language. Babylonian, Assyrian, and Egyptian influences are also seen in the psalms.



The psalms are the production of various authors. "Only a portion of the Book of Psalms claims David as its author. Other inspired poets in successive generations added now one now another contribution to the sacred collection, and thus in the wisdom of Providence it more completely reflects every phase of human emotion and circumstances than it otherwise could." But it is specially to David and his contemporaries that we owe this precious book. In the "titles" of the psalms, the genuineness of which there is no sufficient reason to doubt, 73 are ascribed to David. Peter and John (Acts 4:25) ascribe to him also the second psalm, which is one of the 48 that are anonymous. About two-thirds of the whole collection have been ascribed to David. Psalms

39, 62, and 77 are addressed to Jeduthun, to be sung after his manner or in his choir.

Psalms 50 and 73-83 are addressed to Asaph, as the master of his choir, to be sung in the worship of God. The "sons of Korah," who formed a leading part of the Kohathite singers (2 Chr. 20: 19), were intrusted with the arranging and singing of Ps. 42, 44-49, 84, 85, 87, and 88. In Luke 24:44 the word "psalms" means the Hagiographa, i.e., the holy writings, one of the sections into which the Jews divided the Old Testament. (See Bible.) None of the psalms can be proved to have been of a later date than the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, hence the whole collection extends over a period of about 1,000 years.

There are in the New Testament 116 direct quotations from the Psalter. **The Psalter is divided, after the analogy of the Pentateuch, into five books, each closing with a doxology or benediction;**

- (1.) The first book comprises the first 41 psalms, all of which are ascribed to David except 1, 2, 10, and 33, which, though anonymous, may also be ascribed to him.
- (2.) Book second consists of the next 31 psalms (42-72), 18 of which are ascribed to David and 1 to Solomon (the 72nd). The rest are anonymous.
- (3.) The third book contains 17 psalms (73-89), of which the 86th is ascribed to David, the 88th to Heman the Ezrahite, and the 89th to Ethan the Ezrahite.
- (4.) The fourth book also contains 17 psalms (90-106), of which the 90th is ascribed to Moses, and the 101st and 103rd to David.
- (5.) The fifth book contains the remaining psalms, 44 in number. Of these, 15 are ascribed to David, and the 127th to Solomon.

Ps. 136 is generally called "the great hallel." But the Talmud includes also Ps. 120-135.

Ps. 113-118, inclusive, constitute the "hallel" recited at the three great feasts, at the new moon, and on the eight days of the feast of dedication. "

It is presumed that these several collections were made at times of high religious life: the first, probably, near the close of David's life; the second in the days of Solomon; the third by the singers of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr. 20:19); the fourth by the men of Hezekiah (29, 30, 31); and the fifth in the days of Ezra." The Mosaic ritual makes no provision for the service of song in the worship of God.

David first taught the Church to sing the praises of the Lord. He first introduced into the ritual of the tabernacle music and song. Divers names are given to the psalms. (1.) Some bear the Hebrew designation *shir* (Gr. ode, a song). Thirteen have this title. It means the flow of speech, as it were, in a straight line or in a regular strain. This title includes secular as well as sacred song. (2.) Fifty-eight psalms bear the designation (Heb.) *mitsmor* (Gr. psalmos, a psalm), a lyric ode, or a song set to music; a sacred song accompanied with a musical instrument. (3.) Ps. 145, and many others, have the designation (Heb.) *tehillah* (Gr. hymnos, a hymn), meaning a song of praise; a song the prominent thought of which is the praise of God. (4.) Six psalms (16, 56-60) have the title (Heb.) *michtam* (q.v.). (5.) Ps. 7 and Hab. 3 bear the title (Heb.) *shiggaion* (q.v.).

(Easton Illustrated Dictionary)

Their Authors

The Book of Psalms has sometimes been classified according to authors. For example, the titles indicate that seventy-three were written by David; fifty are anonymous; twelve have the name of Asaph, and ten that of Korah, or the sons

of Korah; two are associated with Solomon and one each with Moses, Heman and Ethan. A comparison of Acts 4:25 and Hebrews 4:7 shows that Psalms 2 and 95 respectively, were also written by David, though not ascribed to him in the book, and the question arises whether he may not have been the author of a still larger number of the anonymous Psalms. As some with the name of the sons of Korah were evidently written for them, may he have been their author as well? The same query arises about the 72d Psalm, one of the two to which Solomon's name is attached. It might be added here that the titles of the Psalms are regarded by many as of equal authority with the text, and hence if we can ascertain what the title means, we may venture to build conclusions upon it.

Their Subjects

The book again, has been classified according to subjects. Angus, in his Bible Handbook, has a convenient classification, giving the subject, and in each case the numbers of a few Psalms illustrating it. For example, there are Psalms of Instruction, like 1, 19, 39. Praise, 8, 29, 93, 100. Thanksgiving, 30, 65, 103, 107, 116. Penitence, 6, 32, 38, 51, 143. Trust, 3, 27, 31, 46, 56, 62, 86. Distress and Sorrow, 4, 13, 55, 64, 88. Aspiration, 42, 63, 80, 84, 137. History, 78, 105, 106. Prophecy (Messianic), 2, 16, 22, 24, 40, 45, 68, 69, 72, 97, 110, 118.

Their Books

It may seem strange to speak of the "Books" of the Psalms, but that expresses another kind of classification. The whole book has been divided into five books, each ending with a similar doxology, as follows: Book I, Psalms 1-41. Book II, Psalms 42-72. Book III, Psalms 73-89. Book IV, Psalms 90-106. Book V, Psalms 107-150. Notice the close of each of these books for the doxology. There are those who question the value of this division, however, on the ground, first, that the title of the book itself in the Hebrew, (Sepher Tehillim), is singular rather than plural. It is not the "books" but the book of Psalms. Second, the numbers of the Psalms continue unbroken from the beginning to the end of the book. Third, there are other doxologies than those especially referred to, e. g., Psalms 117 and 134.

Their Unity

The view of others, therefore, is that the Psalms comprise but one book with an order and unity throughout, the key to which is found in its final application to the millennial age and establishment of the kingdom of God on the earth. According to these, this explains what are known as the imprecatory or cursing Psalms. These have puzzled many, but when we consider them as terminating on that period when the era of mercy for the Gentile nations closes, and the time of their judgment begins, it lightens their problem very much. In the same connection we should remember that the author is speaking in the prophetic

spirit, and that the enemies are enemies of God whose permanent rejection of Him is implied.

This view, moreover, explains those like the 91st Psalm which promise exemption from such things as pestilence and war. This Psalm was written doubtless on the occasion of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, but its language seems to indicate that it is a type of their greater and permanent deliverance in the time to come. This is strengthened if we conceive of the preceding Psalm as a picture of Israel to-day. The opinion which sees the key to the Psalms in their millennial application also furnishes an explanation of the frequent references to Christ found in the Psalms. Urquhart, who maintains the above view, regards the whole book as formed of a combination of twelve sections.

Each of these contains a continuous recurring story of the establishment of God's kingdom on earth, in which Psalms of complaint and pleading on Israel's part are followed by those of jubilation for deliverance. In some of these jubiliations the whole earth is seen to join. These twelve sections are indicated to him by the following jubilant Psalms: 10, 18, 24, 30, 48, 68, 76, 85, 100, 118, 136, 150. "In the first cycle of ten there is progress from the announcement of judgment (1), and manifestation of Christ (2), through His rejection (3-7), suffering and ascension (8), the waiting and persecution of His people (9), to the consummation of all things (10)." This analysis will not commend itself to all, but it is interesting and may lead to further thought.

The godly man vs. the ungodly

Psalm 1

True happiness is the theme of this Psalm, whose author is unnamed. The negative side of true happiness is stated (v. 1), and then the positive (v. 2). Its reward follows (v. 3). Its nature and value are emphasized by a sharp contrast. Such a man is godly, his opposite ungodly (v. 4). The first is marked by stability, the second by instability (v. 4). The first has endless fruitfulness and blessing, the second has nothing and worse than nothing (v. 5), for he can not be acquitted at the judgment day. The secret of it all is found in Jehovah (v. 6). The Psalm is a summary of the whole book, and is appropriately placed at the beginning as a sort of preface.

Messiah's kingship and kingdom

Psalm 2

Is prophetic and Messianic in one (see introductory lesson). It had a partial fulfilment at the first advent of Christ (Acts 4:25; 13:33), but a complete one is to follow at the second advent, as will be seen in the study of the prophets. The

nations will rage and the kings of the earth again set themselves against Jehovah and His Christ under the lead of the Antichrist (vv. 1-3), but they will be regarded with contempt and terrified, by divine judgments (vv. 4, 5). God's purpose will not be altered, which is to establish His Son upon His kingdom in the earth at Jerusalem (v. 6). The Son Himself speaks at verse seven, the last clause of which refers to His inauguration as Mediatorial King, and does not in any way impugn His Deity. The Gentile nations are to be His in that day (v. 8), and although it will be the millennial day, yet its peace and righteousness will be secured through judgments and by the firmness of its Holy Ruler (v. 9). Kings and princes are warned to prepare themselves for its coming (vv. 10-12). "Kiss the Son" means submit to His authority, "lest He be angry and ye perish in the way, for His wrath will soon be kindled" (R. V.).

Psalms 3-7. Trials of the godly

Peaceful trust in God

Psalm 3

As its title indicates, should be read in connection with 2 Samuel 15. In his distress to whom does David appeal (v. 1)? Not only had men turned their backs upon him but it was charged that God had done so. Remember the possible reason for this suspicion in David's sin with Bathsheba, preceding this rebellion of Absalom. Does David still retain his faith in God's promises notwithstanding (v. 3)? What is the ground of his confidence (v. 4)? And its expression (vv. 5, 6)? What is the nature of his further appeal (v. 7)? "Cheek-bone" and "teeth" represent his enemies as wild beasts ready to devour him. By faith he already sees these enemies overcome, and praises God as his deliverer (v. 8). The word "Selah" at the close of verse two is obscure, and may denote a pause or rest, in the singing, or an emphasis to be laid on the particular sentiment expressed.

Evening prayer sustaining faith results

Psalm 4

A cry of distress is this, composed by David, it may have been, on the same occasion as the last. He is not trusting in his own righteousness, but God's righteousness (v. 1). The doctrine of imputed righteousness was apprehended by the spiritually enlightened in Old Testament, as well as in New Testament times. For a further illustration of this in David compare the opening verses of Psalm 32, with Paul's application of them in Romans 4. David is encouraged to utter this cry by past mercies, "Thou hast enlarged me," and I trust Thee again. Verse 2 shows the source of his trouble. His "glory" may refer to his kingly dignity now dishonored by exile. But the schemes of his enemies were "vanity," and brought about by lying "leasing"). His confidence was in the divine purpose towards him (v. 3), and they who are against him are cautioned to repent and

turn to the Lord (vv. 4, 5). In the midst of his afflictions he values the divine favor (v. 6), which brings more experimental joy to him than the husbandman knows at harvest time (vv. 7, 8). "To the chief musician on Neginoth," indicates the purpose for which it was set apart as a musical composition "Neginoth" were the stringed instruments used in the Levitical service, and the "chief musician" was the leader of that part of the choir.

Morning prayer giving courage

Psalm 5

Is a morning prayer (v. 3). The words, "look up" are rendered "keep watch" in the Revised Version. The psalmist would keep watch on himself, that his life and conduct might be such as to insure the answer to his prayer (v. 4-7). The need of the prayer is indicated in verse eight. The enemies referred to are then described (v. 9), and their judgment committed into God's hands who defends the righteous (vv. 11, 12). "Nehiloth," means flutes or wind instruments.

Heart cry of one distressed

Psalm 6

Represents David in deeper distress of soul than we have found him hitherto. Conviction of sin is upon him. Those who have studied 2 Samuel will not need to be reminded of occasions for this experience, though the connection with Bathsheba will first suggest itself. He feels the justness of the divine rebuke (v. 1), but pleads for mercy (v. 2). The time of spiritual darkness has been long extended (vv. 3, 4). Will it end in death (v. 5)? He is heartbroken (vv. 6, 7). Enemies are rejoicing in his sorrow, but their glee is short-lived (vv. 7, 8). Light breaks, the morning dawn, tears are wiped away, for the Lord hath heard him! Begone, mine enemies, be ashamed and turn back (vv. 9, 10)! Verse five need not be interpreted as expressing doubt of a future state, but may be simply a contrast between this scene of life and the unseen world of the dead symbolized by the "grave" (Heb. "sheol"). "Sheminith" means the "eighth," and perhaps this was a Psalm for the eighth key, or the bass of the stringed instruments. Questions 1. Memorize Psalm 1. 2. What is an appropriate theme for it? 3. State the two-fold application of Psalm 2. 4. Will the millennium represent only peace and cheerful obedience to God and His Son? 5. Did you re-read 2 Samuel 15? 6. On what ground might God have forsaken David according to Psalm 3? 7. What may "Selah" mean? 8. What great Gospel doctrine finds illustration in the Psalms of David? 9. Define "Neginoth" and "Nehiloth." 10. What is the Hebrew for "grave"?

Psalms 7-10

The length of our lessons in this book are determined rather arbitrarily by the length of the different Psalms, or the special interest found in them. **We have in**

mind weekly classes wishing to study the whole Bible in a connected way, and yet avoid tediousness in the process. The six Psalms included in the last lesson might easily be read by the class in a week; and on the Lord's Day, the teacher with the assistance of the questions, would have little difficulty in fastening the facts and their application on their minds in a way both interesting and profitable. **At the same time the average person, independent of any class preparation, reading a Psalm a day for private meditation, will probably find the brief comments and questions upon it as much as he will be able to assimilate.**

Cry for protection

Psalm 7

We commence this new lesson with this Psalm because it offers a point of beginning in the title. This, however, is rather obscure since it is not clear who may be meant by "Cush." The margin of the King James Version identifies him with "Shimei" of 2 Samuel 16:5-14, which story it would be well to peruse again, although there are several incidents in Saul's persecution of David which would fit about as well. The word "Shiggaion" in the title means "a plaintive song or elegy." David is persecuted (vv. 1, 2), and charged with wrong-doing to one at peace with him (vv. 3, 4). The charge is so false that he can safely offer the challenge in verse five. Jehovah is appealed to, and asked to sit in judgment on this matter: "Return, Thou on high" (v. 7). "My righteousness" (vv. 8-10) means his innocence of this particular charge. A warning is uttered against the wicked (vv. 11-13), whose folly is described in serious wit (vv. 14-16). David's experience illustrates these concluding verses more than once.

The sovereignty of the Son of man (messianic)

Psalm 8

If the whole book of Psalms be considered a mountain range of poetic prophecy, then this is one of the highest peaks. Observe in the margin how frequently it is quoted in the New Testament, and applied to Jesus Christ. Read Hebrews 2:5-9 especially. "O LORD, our Lord," gives better sense as "O Jehovah, our Lord." His glory is in the Heavens as we see in verse three, and yet it is "above the heavens," both in kind and in degree. So great is His glory that He uses "the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty." (Compare v. 2 with Matt. 11:25; 21:15, 16, and 1 Cor. 1:27). Verses 4-8 find a partial fulfilment in man as created in the first Adam, but their complete fulfilment is seen only in redeemed and regenerated man in the Second Adam. The passage in Hebrews shows this, and particularly alongside of 1 Corinthians 15:22-28. "Upon Gittith" is "set to the Gittith" (R. V.), which, some think, means a tune of a joyous character.

Chapters 9-15. The godly and the wicked one

The godly praise the most high

Psalm 9

Is one of the cursing or imprecatory Psalms which, as stated in the introductory lesson, find their key in the millennial age and the events introductory thereto. It opens with rejoicing (vv. 1, 2). This rejoicing is for victory over enemies (v. 3), but they are God's enemies rather than the psalmist's. It is His coming (presence) that has overcome them. Moreover, they are nations rather than individuals. ("Heathen" in verse five, is "nations" in the R. V.) Their cities are destroyed (v. 6). At the same time the Lord is seen sitting as King (v. 7, R. V.), judging the world in righteousness, comforting the oppressed, dwelling in Zion (vv. 9-12). All these are millennial figures. Israel is lifted from the gates of death (v. 13), and the great tribulation is over. She is praising God in Zion for the deliverance from the Gentile nations which are sunk in the pit they had digged for her (vv. 13-16). And so on the end of the Psalm. "Muth-labben" may refer like "Gittith" to the name or character of the tune.

Supplication of the godly

Psalm 10

Seems allied in thought with that preceding, and the two may have been one, originally. The psalmist is not referring to personal experiences, but to those which are more general. It seems as though the poor and oppressed of the nation and the whole world were uttering their complaint through him. Because God seems far away, the wicked are flourishing (vv. 1, 2). It would not be out of place to conceive of the wicked in this Psalm as personified in the Antichrist at the end of this age, when, as we shall learn later, he will be persecuting Israel as God's witness in the earth. This is not to say that, in no sense, the Psalm is applicable to an earlier period in the history of that people, but that in its fuller sense, it is for the time to come. The wicked one is described as boastful, covetous, proud, atheistic, self-opinionated, bold, deceitful, oppressive, and cunning (vv. 3-11, R. V.). The "poor" means, as is customary in the Psalms, "the poor in spirit," described by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. They are sad and sorrowful sufferers for righteousness' sake, even though they may be rich in this world's goods. "Meek" would be a better word to describe them than "poor." The description of the wicked oppressor is followed by the usual appeal to God (vv. 12-15), who is represented as reigning over the millennial earth, punishing the wicked, establishing the meek, and judging the oppressed against "the man of the earth" who, as has been said, may well be taken for the Antichrist. Questions i. What is the title or inscription of Psalm 7? 2. What is the meaning of "Shiggaion" and "Gittith"? 3. Have you read 1 Corinthians 15:22-28 and Hebrews 2:5-9? 4. What is the key to the imprecatory Psalms? 5. To what period

does Psalm 10 seem to apply? 6. Who are usually meant by the "poor" in these Psalms? 7. What title is given to the wicked one in Psalm 10?

Faith's resources

Psalm 11

A song of trust. The declaration of verse one, "In the Lord put I my trust," is buttressed by the reason in verse seven, while all between is descriptive of the condition in which David finds himself. Urged to flee from his enemies (v. 1), he shows the futility of the attempt (v. 2). The moral foundations are being undermined (v. 3), and only Jehovah is able to discriminate and judge (vv. 4-6).

The arrogance of sinners

Psalm 12

The evil speaker. The close relation between this and the preceding Psalm is easily discovered. David's enemy is the deceitful flatterer (vv. 1, 2). But his judgment is of the Lord (vv. 3-5), the sincerity of whose utterances are in contrast with those of the enemy (vv. 6-8).

The faith of the godly

Psalm 13

Sorrow. The Lord seems long in coming to His servant's relief from the slanderers in the Psalms preceding (vv. 1, 2). Will He never come (vv. 3, 4)? Yea, He cometh soon, and faith and hope rejoice (vv. 5, 6).

Human apostasy and depravity

Psalm 14

The whole world corrupt. All sinners are fools (v. 1) because they think and act contrary to right reason First, they think wrong ("in his heart," Gen. 6:12), and then soon they act wrong (Prov. 23:7). This is true of the world generally (vv. 2-4). "Eat up My People" is a phrase denoting the "bestly fury" of the Gentile enemies of Israel. Verses 5 and 6 show their indifference rather than their ignorance of God. If the closing verse seems to refer to the period of the Babylonian captivity and therefore raises a question as to the Davidic authorship (see title), we should remember that the language is typical of any great evil, and that David may be speaking as in other instances, in the prophetic sense. In that case the Psalm takes on a millennial aspect.

The character of the godly

Psalm 15

Holiness and its reward. Here a question is asked, verse one, which finds its answer in the verses following, the whole dialogue being summed up in the last sentence. To abide in God's tabernacle, etc., is to hold fellowship with God and enjoy the blessings incident thereto. These are for the man whose conduct is right, who is truthful, sincere, separate from the ungodly, and uninfluenced by covetousness and bribery.



A Christ-Centred Reading of the Psalms

a. Christ is the supreme revelation of God (see Ps. 19:4 cf. Rom. 10:18). He brings the law of God, meant to lead and guide us, to its perfect expression. The character of God is perfectly reflected in Jesus Christ.

b. In the Psalms, a key place is given to God's Anointed One. It is the Anointed One (the Messiah) who will ultimately establish the Kingdom of God. He will be the true vice-regent of God, the image of God par excellence. The New Testament applies this title to Jesus. He is called "the Christ," or the "Anointed One."

c. Since the Davidic covenant is so central in the book of Psalms, it is important to note that all the main features of that covenant come to their full realization in Christ: (1) an offspring of David who will build the Lord's house (2) a father-son relationship between God and this

descendent of David (3) an enduring dynasty and kingdom.

d. Christ is our true King. In Christ, divine kingship and human kingship merge together. And he has all authority in heaven and on earth, and will reign until all things are brought into subjection under him. In our day, the present reign of Christ is not openly acknowledged by all, but one day will be. He will be the one who is exalted in all the earth. Jesus Christ is the one who ultimately brings the Kingdom of God.

e. In respect to the royal psalms, Psalm 110 deserves mention here. This psalm is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament, and provides a clear and direct predictive oracle concerning Christ. In two remarkable prophecies, the Word of God predicts that the office of both king and priest will somehow merge together in one person, and it will be forever.

f. Christ is our true Priest. While he had no need to confess his own sin (e.g. Ps. 51), he does confess ours, and he even owns them in order to die for them. He became sin. Rather than offer bulls and goats, he offers himself as our atoning sacrifice. It is through him that we are made acceptable and can come into the presence of God with boldness. Jesus is the only reason we can have renewal and peace with God.

g. Christ is the means by which we receive every blessing in the Psalms. The blessings described in the Psalms are the blessings of the COVENANT. As the mediator of the covenant, Jesus fulfills all the obligations of the covenant for us, and he also dispenses all the blessings of the covenant to us. Because of his faithfulness, we can have the confidence in God that so many psalms express (see Psalm 91, 23, 16, 27, and others for psalms of confidence).

h. Christ also represents the true and complete presence of God among us. Because he is with us and makes himself available, he is our truest refuge and our greatest help when we are in need. We can always go to him directly, and he can understand our deepest pains in a way that no one else can. The Son of God is acquainted with our sufferings because he became just like us.

i. Jesus would have participated in the laments of the community by praying the community laments along with the people of God who were suffering. Jesus identifies with the cries of broken people. Thus, we're given great insight into his humanity. He understood the questions, sufferings, and cries of those who lament. Not only did Jesus lament with his people, he also lamented for his people. He was terribly distressed concerning the fate of Jerusalem. By rejecting Jesus, a large part of Israel would be

rejecting God, and would bring God's judgment upon themselves. This was a heart-breaking reality for Jesus. As we see in the Psalms, to reject God's Anointed One is to reject God himself and to perish.

j. The psalms also give us great insight into God's own perspective which was the perspective that Jesus always abided by. Jesus had to deal with rejection his whole life, and would only be vindicated at the end. Thus, the psalms invite us to always look beyond present suffering to the greater glory which follows. The all-too familiar theme of hope beyond suffering that is so prevalent in the Psalms anticipates the pattern of the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus Christ.

k. The three longest and most intense lament psalms are Psalms 22, 31, and 69, all of which are echoed in the passion of Christ. The biblical effect is to portray Jesus' passion as the fullest expression of oneness with God. Jesus Christ suffers precisely because he is faithful to God and God's purposes.

l. The very darkest lament psalms (Ps. 88 and others) anticipate the darkest moment in all of history, and the very darkest night of any soul. Because Jesus experienced the dark night of the soul for us, we can be assured that darkness will not be the last word.

m. Many of the imprecations anticipate the judgment to come upon all of God's enemies that will be fully executed by Jesus Christ. However, now is a time when salvation is possible for all, and ultimate judgment is delayed. Therefore, the possibility always remains that rather than be judged. God's enemies may very well be converted. But we always know that every world power that stands opposed to God will eventually be brought to nothing. Every enemy will be brought under the feet of Christ. As a result, they will be under our feet as well, since we will reign with him.

n. In the Psalms, it appears that the enemies will be victorious and that their strength and power will prevail. We see the same spiritual dynamic in the life of Christ. It appeared that the enemies had triumphed over him. But it was God's plan all along to be victorious through weakness. Thus, the wisdom of the world was made foolish through a cross.

o. Jesus Christ is the ultimate vindicated servant of God. In the face of many false accusations, he is proven to be true and righteous. The resurrection is God's ultimate act that vindicates his own Son, and results in the certainty that we too will be vindicated in him.

p. Jesus Christ is our Warrior-King, who manifests his commanding presence and fights our battles for us. Our strength is not what gets us

through life, but his. In our weakness, he is strong.

q. Jesus Christ brings to full expression God's faithfulness to his covenant. All the promises of the covenant are realized in him. So the steadfast love of God and the faithfulness that is said to endure forever cannot be understood apart from Christ.

r. By examining the history of redemption (as summarized in many psalms of remembrance), the people of God were to look back on past events and remember their identity and who they were called to be. Jesus Christ, as a member of the covenant community, identified with these same events. These events gave shape to the identity of Jesus. In looking back to these events, Jesus would see himself in all of the Scriptures since the history of redemption points to him.

s. The Psalms use many metaphors to describe God (shepherd, refuge, hiding-place, light, rock, food and drink, etc.), providing us with rich images of our Saviour. At the center of redemptive history, we see God putting flesh on all of these images as he reveals himself in Christ.

Chapters 16-24

Christ obedient is resurrected

Psalm 16

Sometimes called "**The Psalm of the Resurrection**," is one of the great Messianic Psalms (see introductory lesson). While it is interesting to consider David as uttering the prayer, for it is a prayer, how much more so to think of Christ! On some mountain side, in the night's darkness, He may have poured out these petitions and praises. (For its Messianic application compare verses 8-11 with Acts 2:25-31, and 13:35). Observe the spirit of confidence (v. 1), loyalty to God (v. 2), love toward the saints (v. 3), separation from the world (v. 4), contentment (vv. 5, 6), obedience (vv. 7, 8), hope (vv. 9, 10), expectation (v. 11). The Revised Version throws light on the text. "Michtam" means "A Golden Psalm" (see margin) and such it is in its preciousness even above others.

Christ the Intercessor

Psalm 17

Is a prayer in which vindication is desired. It makes such great claims that one thinks of it as Messianic also (vv. 1-4), and yet like Psalm 7, the writer may have some specific transaction in mind as to which his hands are clean. Note the

testimony to the power of God's word (v. 4). What is asked is guidance (vv. 5, 6), and preservation (vv. 7, 8). The latter is desired from the wicked whose description follows as proud (vv. 9, 10), treacherous (vv. 11, 12), and yet prosperous in worldly things (v. 14). This prosperity is transient in comparison with his own expectation (v. 15). Have the Revised Version convenient in reading these Psalms, for the interpretation it casts on some obscure passages. Questions 1. What is the leading thought of Psalm 11? 2. Against what class of enemies are the psalmist's words frequently directed? 3. Why are sinners called "fools"? 4. Which of the Psalms of this lesson are millennial and messianic? 5. Have you compared the passages in Acts? 6. What does "Michtam" mean?

God's power preserved Christ

Psalm 18

A song of victory. It opens with ejaculatory expressions of triumph for deliverance. All nature is described as convulsed when the Almighty presses to the rescue. The next division is meditation on the principles involved, the whole closing with a further outburst of triumph and confidence. 2 Samuel 22 is a copy of this ode saving a few variations, and the student is referred to our treatment of it at that place.

Christ in creation and revelation

Psalm 19

God's revelation in the world and in the Word. We have a contrast between these two in this Psalm. In verses one to six there is the general revelation of the heavens, "wordless but extending their sphere over the whole earth," which then specializes to the sun as the chief figure of it all. But in 7-14, the law is celebrated, whose function is to warn against sin, and by conformity to which only can our thought and conduct become acceptable to God. Observe the literary beauty as well as the spiritual teaching in the description of the law, six names, six epithets and six effects. The clearer our apprehension of the law, so the Psalm teaches, the clearer is our view of sin, and the more evident that grace only can cleanse and keep us from it.

Psalm 20: Christ and His salvation

Psalm 21. Christ's kingly glory is anticipated

Psalms 20 and 21

Are coupled in The Modern Reader's Bible, and called "**An Antiphonal War Anthem.**" The first gives the prayers of the king and the people before the battle, and the second the thanksgiving after the victory. As to the first, we hear the people (vv. 1-5), the king (v. 6), and then the people to the end. As to the second, the king is first (vv. 1-7), and then the people to the end. While this may

be the historical setting of these Psalms, yet we are at liberty to apply their utterances in the spiritual scene to the experiences of believers in the Christian Church.

Christ's suffering and coming glory

Psalm 22

The **Psalm of the Cross**. Is this one of the great Messianic Psalms? **Christ uttered the first verse on the cross (Matt. 27:46)**, and there is reason to think the words of the last were also heard. "He hath done it" (R. V.), in the Hebrew, corresponds closely to, "It is finished" (John 19:30). If this were so, may we suppose that the whole Psalm was the language of the divine sufferer as He bore our sins on the cross? There are three strophes, or great poetical divisions, each associated with the phrase, "Far from me." The first covers verses 1 to 10, the second 11 to 18, the third 19 to 31. In the first, we have a cry of distress (vv. 1, 2), an expression of confidence (vv. 3-5), a description of the enemies (vv. 6-8), and a second expression of confidence (vv. 9-10). In the second, we have two descriptions, the surrounding enemies (vv. 11-13), and the sufferer's experiences (vv. 14-18). In the third the whole tone is changed to a note of victory (vv. 19-21), a testimony of praise (vv. 22-26), and a prophecy of resurrection glory (vv. 27-31). The Psalm gives a graphic picture of death by crucifixion with circumstances precisely fulfilled at Calvary. As that form of death penalty was Roman rather than Jewish, we agree with the Scofield Reference Bible that the "proof of inspiration is irresistible." At verse 22 the Psalm breaks from crucifixion to resurrection (compare John 20:17).



Christ the Great Shepherd

Psalm 23

1: The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

2: He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

3: He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

4: Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

5: Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

6: Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Psalm 23

The **Shepherd Psalm** is such a favorite with all as to make an attempted exposition almost an offence. Did David compose it as a youth tending his father's sheep? If not, it must have been when occupied in reminiscences of those early days. Note the possessive, "my shepherd," and the future, "shall not want." Because the Lord is my Shepherd I am Feeding on the Word, "pastures" Fellowshiping the Spirit, "waters" Being renewed, "restoreth" Surrendered in will, "leadeth" Trusting the promises, "fear no evil" Enjoying security, "a table" Doing service, "runneth over" Possessing hope, "forever."

Christ the Chief Shepherd

Psalm 24

Is frequently defined as the **Ascension Psalm**. The Scofield Bible speaks of these last three Psalms, however, 22 23 and 24, as a trilogy. In the first, the good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep (John 10:11), in the second, the great Shepherd "brought again from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant," tenderly cares for His sheep (Heb. 13:20), and in the last, the chief Shepherd appears as king of glory to own and reward the sheep (I Pet. 5:4). From this point of view the order is: (a), the declaration of title, "The earth is the Lord's" (vv. 1, 2); (b), the challenge (vv. 3-6), it is a question of worthiness and no one is worthy but the Lamb (compare Dan. 7:13, 14; Rev. 5:3-10); (c), the king takes the throne (vv. 7-10), (compare Matt. 25: 31). Questions 7. Where have we met earlier with the contents of Psalm 18? 1. What theme would you assign to Psalm 19? 2. Give the names, epithets and effects of the law. 3. What is the historical setting of Psalms 20 and 21? 4. How does John 19:30 suggest the last verse of Psalm 22? 5. Of what is this Psalm a picture? 6. What proof of inspiration does it contain? 7. By what name has Psalm 24 been called? 8. How may the last three Psalms be classified? 9. Amplify this last idea. 10. From this

point of view, what is the order of Psalm 24? 11. What may have been the historical origin of the Psalm last named?

Psalms 25-39. Soul exercise of the godly

Petition for deliverance

Psalm 25

In the Hebrew this prayer is arranged as an acrostic, i. e., the first word of each verse begins with a letter in alphabetical order from A to Z. Hereafter we shall not give as much attention to every Psalm as we have thus far, but trust the reader to do the analyzing after the examples given. **The purpose of the Commentary is not so much textual explanation as a stimulus to Bible study in a broader sense, and it is assumed that the reader has been studying the Bible side by side with the Commentary from the beginning.** The more difficult Psalms, some of the more familiar and popular, and those distinctively Messianic and millennial may be treated more at length, but others must be passed over. In the present instance the prayer is for defence (vv. 1-3), guidance (vv. 4, 5), forgiveness (vv. 6-11), etc., intermingled with testimony to the divine goodness (vv. 12-15).

Prayer for vindication

Psalm 26

Is another appeal to God on the basis of avowed integrity and innocence of the charges of enemies. Note the features of righteous character of which the psalmist speaks, as well as the description of his enemies. The Modern Reader's Bible names this Psalm, "**Searchings of heart before worship.**"

Prayer for spiritual orientation

Psalm 27

Is called by the volume named above "**An Anthem of Deliverance,**" and throughout it exhibits confidence, hope and joy, in God's worship, with prayer for help and guidance in danger. The secret of the psalmist's confidence is given in verse four as his delight in divine fellowship expressed in worshiping in God's tabernacle. God will protect and deliver him (vv. 5, 6). He will be more to him than earthly parents (v. 10). All he craves is guidance (v. 11). He concludes with counsel to others in a like case (vv. 13, 14).

Prayer for deliverance

Psalm 28

The prayer, verses 1-5, is followed by thanksgiving for the answer in verses 6-9.
Verses 1-5:

David is very earnest in prayer. Observe his faith in prayer; God is my rock, on whom I build my hope. Believers should not rest till they have received some token that their prayers are heard. He prays that he may not be numbered with the wicked. Save me from being entangled in the snares they have laid for me. Save me from being infected with their sins, and from doing as they do. Lord, never leave me to use such arts of deceit and treachery for my safety, as they use for my ruin. Believers dread the way of sinners; the best are sensible of the danger they are in of being drawn aside: we should all pray earnestly to God for his grace to keep us. Those who are careful not to partake with sinners in their sins, have reason to hope that they shall not receive their plagues. He speaks of the just judgments of the Lord on the workers of iniquity, verse 4. This is not the language of passion or revenge. It is a prophecy that there will certainly come a day, when God will punish every man who persists in his evil deeds. Sinners shall be reckoned with, not only for the mischief they have done, but for the mischief they designed, and did what they could to effect. Disregard of the works of the Lord, is the cause of the sin of sinners, and becomes the cause of their ruin.

Verses 6-9:

Has God heard our supplications? Let us then bless his name. The Lord is my strength, to support me, and carry me on through all my services and sufferings. The heart that truly believes, shall in due time greatly rejoice: we are to expect joy and peace in believing. God shall have the praise of it: thus must we express our gratitude. The saints rejoice in others' comfort as well as their own: we have the less benefit from the light of the sun, nor from the light of God's countenance, for others' sharing therein. The psalmist concludes with a short, but comprehensive prayer. God's people are his inheritance, and precious in his eyes. He prays that God would save them; that he would bless them with all good, especially the plenty of his ordinances, which are food to the soul. And direct their actions and overrule their affairs for good. Also, lift them up for ever; not only those of that age, but his people in every age to come; lift them up as high as heaven. There, and there only, will saints be lifted up for ever, never more to sink, or be depressed. Save us, Lord Jesus, from our sins; bless us, thou Son of Abraham, with the blessing of righteousness; feed us, thou good Shepherd of the sheep, and lift us up for ever from the dust, O thou, who art the Resurrection and the Life.

From Matthew Concise Commentary

The storm of judgment

Psalm 29

“The Song of the Thunderstorm,” encourages confidence in God by the celebration of His power in His dominion over the natural world. “Discovereth the forests” (v. 9) means “stripping them bare.” In the midst of this sublimity God’s worshipers cry, “Glory!” (R. V.)

Praise for healing

Psalm 30

States its occasion in the title, the reference being to David's own house or palace (compare Deut. 20:5); 2 Sam. 5:11; 7:2).

Victory over enemies

Psalm 31

Is a cry of one in distress, which some have referred to as the period of David's persecution by Saul at Keilah. Read 1 Samuel 23:1-15, and then note in the Psalm, verses 4, 8, 10-15, 20-22.

The blessing of being justified

Psalm 32

Reads like "David's Spiritual Biography." It is thought to have been written after his sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11, 12). He has been brought to repentance for that sin and forgiven (Psalm 51), and now is praising God for that forgiveness, and telling what led up to it. It opens with a general declaration of his blessedness and why (vv. 1, 2). This is followed by his experience before forgiveness and when he was undergoing conviction of sin (vv. 3, 4). Confession brought forgiveness (v. 5). Let others act similarly in the same circumstances (v. 6). See what God is to him now (v. 7). The Psalm takes the form of a dialogue at this point, and God speaks at verses eight and nine, which should be read in the Revised Version. The whole concludes with a warning and exhortation (vv. 10, 11).

Praise to the Lord

Psalm 33

Is one of praise. It opens with a general chorus (vv. 1-3). This is followed by a semi-chorus (vv. 4-11), a second semi-chorus (vv. 12-19), and a final chorus (vv. 20-22). To follow this division suggested by the Modern Reader's Bible, is to obtain a good idea of the several subjects.

Full praise of God's redeemed

Psalm 34

Has its occasion indicated in the title which refers to I Samuel 21:13. The name there is Achish, but some think Abimelech was the general name given the sovereigns of Gath at that time (Gen. 20:2). This is also an acrostic, and from a musical point of view consists of an introduction (vv. 1, 2), solos and choruses. For one solo, see verses 3-6, and for another 11-14.

Cry for help in distress

Psalm 35

May be read in connection with I Samuel 24, which some regard as its occasion. A comparison of that chapter will throw light on the meaning of several of its expressions.

Contrast of the wicked and the Lord

Psalm 36

What the wicked is and does, verses 1-4, is contrasted with what the Lord is and does, verses 5-9. The Lord is to be petitioned and trusted, verses 10-12.

The righteous and wicked in contrast

Psalm 37

Is one of the most popular of the Psalms of trust and confidence, whose contents are illustrated in David's personal history. It is an acrostic, which requires little in the way of explanation to any heart who really knows God through Jesus Christ. The theme is the prosperity of the wicked with counsel as to how the child of God should act in regard to it. Questions I. What is an acrostic Psalm? 2. What earlier Psalm is suggested by the theme of Psalm 26? 3. Point out the poetic descriptions of a thunder-storm in Psalm 29. 4. What experience is Psalm 31 thought to describe? 5. Have you again read 1 Samuel 23:1-15? 6. Give a title of Psalm 32, and a reason for it. 7. What idea is conveyed by "semichorus"? 8. Memorize Psalm 37:1-9.

The suffering saint and sin

Psalm 38

When the suffering saint, verses 1-8, looks to the Lord, verses 9-15, confession of sin and prayer result, verses 16-22.

Human frailty

Psalm 39

The emptiness of life, verses 1-6, should lead to self-judgment and prayer.

Summary from Psalms 40 to 150

Psalms 40-41. David's experiences foreshadow Christ's

Psalms 42-49. Through tribulation to kingdom blessing

Psalms 50-51. The righteous God and His penitent people

Psalms 52-55. Israel's time of trouble

Psalms 56-60. Trials of the saints before blessing

Psalms 61-68. Through sufferings to kingdom blessing

Psalms 69-72. Christ rejected and exalted

Psalm 69. The sufferings of the rejected Messiah

Psalm 70. Israel's prayer for deliverance

Psalm 71. Israel's paeon of hope

Psalm 72. The great kingdom psalm

Psalm 73-83. Psalm of Asaph concerning the sanctuary

Psalms 84-89. Prayer issuing in kingdom glory

Psalms 90-93. From sinful wandering to redemption rest

Psalms 94-100. Judgment and the glories of the coming age

Psalms 101-106. The righteous king in humiliation and glory

Psalm 101. The righteous King and his Rule

Psalm 102. Christ the King in His rejection

Psalm 103. Israel's kingdom praise

Psalm 104. Creation's praise

Psalm 105. Historical retrospect

Psalm 106. Historical retrospect

Psalms 107-108. Israel's deliverances and praise to God

Book 5 of the Psalter, Psalms 107-150, is compared by some to Deuteronomy. It sets forth the divine dealing with Israel eventuating in the deliverance for them, the nation and all creation.

Psalms 109-113. Christ in rejection, exaltation and coming glory.

Psalm 109. Prediction of Christ's rejection

Psalm 110. Christ as King-Priest

Psalm 111. Hallelujah! The King-Priest on his throne

Psalm 112. Hallelujah! The righteous are rewarded by the King-Priest on his throne.

Psalm 113. Hallelujah! Praise the Lord

Psalms 114-117

Psalm 114. The Egyptian deliverance in retrospect

Psalm 115. Israel's God

Psalm 116. Israel's praise of God for deliverance from death

Psalm 117. Universal praise in the kingdom

Psalms 118-119. Messiah and the Word of God exalted

Psalm 118. Messiah exalted as the Chief Cornerstone

Psalm 119. The Word of God exalted

Psalms 120-134. The Psalms of ascent

Apparently these psalms were sung as pilgrims went up to Jerusalem to the sacred feasts.

Psalm 120. Suffering of the godly

Psalm 121. Israel's keeper and preserver

Psalm 122. Prayer for Jerusalem's peace

Psalm 123. Cry for mercy in distress

Psalm 124. Answer of prayer for mercy

Psalm 125. Reward of the righteous and punishment for the wicked

Psalm 126. Song of the returned captives

Psalm 127. Prais God whom all blessings flow

Psalm 128. Blessings out of Zion *(are to be fully realised when the Lord reigns)*

Psalm 129. The Lord, Israel's preserver

Psalm 130. The Lord, Israel's faithful redeemer

Psalm 131. The Lord, Israel's hope

Psalm 132. Messiah, David's son enthroned

Psalm 133. The blessings of fraternal harmony.

Psalm 134. Blessed worship

Psalms 135-136. Restored Israel in praiseful worship

Psalm 135. The cleansed nation worships

Psalm 136. The redeemed nation's praise of God's mercy

Psalms 137-138. The experiences of God's people in the light of their God

Psalm 137. The experience of the exile

Psalm 138. Praise to the Lord

Psalm 139. Israel's Creator Redeemer

Psalms 140-143. Trials and troubles of God's people

Psalms 140-143. Prayer for deliverance from enemies

Psalms 144-145. David's experiences a mirror of Israel's future

Psalm 144. Prayer for the manifestation of the Lord's power

Psalm 145. The glory of King-Messiah and His kingdom

Psalms 146-150. The grand hallelujah finale

Psalm 146. Hallelujah! The God of Jacob

Psalm 147. Hallelujah! For His power and providential care

Psalm 148. Hallelujah! Let all creatures praise in heaven and on earth

Psalm 149. Hallelujah! Sing the new song of redemption

Psalm 150. Hallelujah! Climactic crescendo of universal praise

Themes from Psalms 40 to 150 for meditation and prayer. (*Don't miss Psalms 1 to 39 from page 141*).

Psalms 40: The obedient Christ, his path of obedience (verses 6-12), is prefaced by the Redeemer's resurrection son, verses 1-3.

Psalms 41-42: Treachery of Judas Foretold/The Righteous Thirst for God; The wicked say... "Where is thy God?"

Psalms 43-44: Light and Truth/Sheep for the Slaughter

Psalms 45-46: The Messiah Fairer than the Children of Men/"Know that I am God"

Psalms 47-48: Sing with Intelligence/God Never Changes

Psalms 49-50: The Glory of the Rich Man will eventually die/Asaph Speaks of the Second Coming!

Psalms 51-52: David Pleads for Forgiveness/Wicked Tongues

Psalms 53-54: The Fools Say there is NO GOD!/David Pleads to God

Psalms 55-56: David Seeks Protection/The Book of Remembrance

Psalms 57-58; David Pleads for Mercy/The Wicked Speak Lies

Psalms 59-60: Delivered from Enemies/Ephraim... The Head of His People

Psalms 61-62: Shelter in the Lord/God= Rock and Salvation

Psalms 63-64: David "Thirsts" for God/David Prays for Safety

Psalms 65-66: Blessedness of God's Chosen/God Tests Man

Psalms 67-68: God Judges in Righteousness/JAH

Psalms 69-70: David is Persecuted/Let God be Magnified

Psalms 71-72: Praises of Thanksgiving/Solomon a Type of Christ

Psalms 73-74: God is Good/The Foolish Shall Say: No Prophets

Psalms 75-76: Thank God/God Shall Save the Earth

Psalms 77-78: The Righteous Remember Wonders of God/Israel = Teach the Lords Law

Psalms 79-80: The Heathen Destroy Jerusalem/The Shepherd of Israel

Psalms 81-82: Walk in the Ways of the Lord/Ye are Gods of the Most High

Psalms 83-84: Jehovah Most High over the Earth/Cry unto God

Psalms 85-86: Truth Shall Spring out of the Earth (The Book of Mormon)/Saved from the lowest Hell

Psalms 87-88: The Lord Loves the Gates of Zion/Loving Kindness of the Lord

Psalms 89-90: Christ's Throne shall be established/Man's days, compared to God's

Psalms 91-92: The Lord will deliver/A Song for the Sabbath Day

Psalms 93-94: The Lord is Everlasting/The Lord Shall Judge the Earth

Psalms 95-96: Praise the Lord/The Lord shall Judge His People

Psalms 97-98: The Millennium/Sing unto the Lord

Psalms 99-100: The Lord: Great in Zion/The Psalm of Thanksgiving

Psalms 101-102: Cutting of the "Evildoers"/Zion shall be built when Christ comes

Psalms 103-104: The Lord Shows Mercy/Honor and Majesty of the Lord

Psalms 105-106: The Covenant of Abraham/Moses helped Israel

Psalms 107-108: Oh that man would praise the Lord!/David Praises God

Psalms 109-110: Cursing's of the wicked/Melchizedek

Psalms 111-112: Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom/Blessed are them who fear the Lord

Psalms 113-114: Who is like unto the Lord?/The Lord Governs the Sea and the Land

Psalms 115-116: Idols are False Gods/Precious in the eyes of the Lord, the Death of the Saints

Psalms 117-118: The Truth Endureth forever/The Head Stone

Psalms 119: The Laws of God

Psalms 120-121: I am for Peace, but they want War/The Lord will persevere from evil.

Psalms 122-123: Give Thanks unto Him/Plead for mercy.

Psalms 124-125: Israel's Help is the Lord/Trust in the Lord

Psalms 126-127: The Lord is great/Children of God

Psalms 128-129: Walk in the ways of the Lord/Those who are confounded

Psalms 130-131: O, Lord... hear us/Be Like Little Children

Psalms 132-133: The Fruit of David's Loins/Unity

Psalms 134-135: Bless the Lord & He will do the same/God is Like Man

Psalms 136-137: God of gods, Lord of lords/The Jews Weep

Psalms 138-139: David Praises the Lord/God knows our thoughts and desires

Psalms 140-141: Pray for Deliverance from Enemies/David Pleads with the Lord

Psalms 142-143: David Prays for Help/David prays for Fair Judgment

Psalms 144-145: Happy are those in the Lord/Praise the Lord for His power

Psalms 146-147: Happy are those in the Lord/Praise the Lord for His power

Psalms 148-150: Let All Things Praise God/Praise the Lord

Authorship: *(read also above on the authors of Psalms)*

The brief descriptions that introduce the psalms have David listed as author in 73 instances. David's personality and identity are clearly stamped on many of these psalms. While it is clear that David wrote many of the individual psalms, he is definitely not the author of the entire collection. Two of the psalms (72) and (127) are attributed to Solomon, David's son and successor. Psalm 90 is a prayer assigned to Moses. Another group of 12 psalms (50) and (73—83) is ascribed to the family of Asaph. The sons of Korah wrote 11 psalms (42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88). Psalm 88 is attributed to Heman, while (89) is assigned to Ethan the Ezrahite. With the exception of Solomon and Moses, all these additional authors were priests or Levites who were responsible for providing music for sanctuary worship during David's reign. Fifty of the psalms designate no specific person as author.

Date of Writing:

A careful examination of the authorship question, as well as the subject matter covered by the psalms themselves, reveals that they span a period of many centuries. The oldest psalm in the collection is probably the prayer of Moses (90), a reflection on the frailty of man as compared to the eternity of God. The latest psalm is probably (137), a song of lament clearly written during the days when the Hebrews were being held captive by the Babylonians, from about 586 to 538 B.C.

It is clear that the 150 individual psalms were written by many different people across a period of a thousand years in Israel's history. They must have been compiled and put together in their present form by some unknown editor shortly after the captivity ended about 537 B.C.

Purpose of Writing:

The Book of Psalms is the longest book in the Bible, with 150 individual psalms. It is also one of the most diverse, since the psalms deal with such subjects as God and His creation, war, worship, wisdom, sin and evil, judgment, justice, and the coming of the Messiah.

Key Verses:

Psalm 19:1 "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."

Psalm 22:16-19, "Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."

Psalm 23:1, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want."

Psalm 29:1-2, "Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendour of his holiness."

Psalm 51:10, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

Psalm 119:1-2, "Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. Blessed are they who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart."

Brief Summary:

The Book of Psalms is a collection of prayers, poems, and hymns that focus the worshiper's thoughts on God in praise and adoration. Parts of this book were used as a hymnal in the worship services of ancient Israel. The musical heritage of the psalms is demonstrated by its title. It comes from a Greek word which means "a song sung to the accompaniment of a musical instrument."

Foreshadowings:

God's provision of a Savior for His people is a recurring theme in the Psalms. Prophetic pictures of the Messiah are seen in numerous psalms. Psalm 2:1-12 portrays the Messiah's triumph and kingdom. Psalm 16:8-11 foreshadows His death and resurrection. Psalm 22 shows us the suffering Saviour on the cross and presents detailed prophecies of the crucifixion, all of which were fulfilled perfectly. The glories of the Messiah and His bride are on exhibit in Psalm 45:6-7, while Psalms 72:6-17, 89:3-37, 110:1-7 and 132:12-18 present the glory and universality of His reign.

Practical Application:

One of the results of being filled with the Spirit or the word of Christ is singing. The psalms are the “songbook” of the early church that reflected the new truth in Christ.

God is the same Lord in all the psalms. But we respond to Him in different ways, according to the specific circumstances of our lives. What a marvelous God we worship, the psalmist declares, One who is high and lifted up beyond our human experiences but also one who is close enough to touch and who walks beside us along life's way.

We can bring all our feelings to God—no matter how negative or complaining they may be—and we can rest assured that He will hear and understand. The psalmist teaches us that the most profound prayer of all is a cry for help as we find ourselves overwhelmed by the problems of life.

Prophetic Psalms

There are verses with Bible prophecy implications throughout the entire Bible: from the Book of Genesis to the Book of Revelation. One of the books that I think is underestimated in terms of how much Bible prophecy content it contains is the Book of Psalms. I spent some time over the years searching in the Book of Psalms to find verses, passages, and chapters that may have Bible prophecy implications.

Today I dare to share some of what I found to show that people should not ignore the Book of Psalms when trying to find information that can help one better understand the future.

Hereby some of the results of my prayerful and careful searching in the Word of God

Psalm 11:6-7 and Psalm 75:7-8: Wine of the Wrath of God

Revelation 14:9-10 tells us that an angel will proclaim to the world that those with the mark of the beast shall drink the wine of the wrath of God. Psalm 11:6-7 and Psalm 75:7-8 appear to be verses related to the pouring of the wine of the Lord's wrath on the wicked.

Psa 11:6 Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: *this*

Psa 75:7 But God *is* the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.

Rev 14:9 And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and

shall be the portion of their cup.

Psa 11:7 For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright.

Psa 75:8 For in the hand of the LORD *there is* a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out of the same; but the dregs thereof, *all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them.*

receive *his* mark in his forehead, or in his hand,

Rev 14:10 The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:

Psalm 18:6-7; Psalm 97:1-7; Psalm 102:12-16: The Lord Rises to Act

There are several Bible prophecy passages which talk about the Lord arising to punish the wicked in anger/wrath, including Isaiah 2:20-21. Psalm 97:1-7, Psalm 18:6-7, and Psalm 102:12-16 each have elements that relate to Isaiah 2:20-21, including:

- The earth shaking violently as the Lord arises (in blue)
- The people seeing the Lord's glory (in green)
- People not so certain about the idols they worship (in gray)

Isa 2:20 In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made *each one* for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats;

Psa 18:6 In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, *even* into his ears.

Isa 2:21 To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, *and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth* to shake terribly the earth.

Psa 18:7 Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, *because he was wroth.*

Psa 97:1 The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad *thereof*.

Psa 102:12 But thou, O LORD, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance unto all generations.

Psa 97:2 Clouds and darkness *are* round about him: righteousness and judgment *are* the habitation of his throne.

Psa 97:3 A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about.

Psa 97:4 His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled.

Psa 97:5 The hills melted like wax at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth.

Psa 97:6 The heavens declare his righteousness, **and all the people see his glory.**

Psa 97:7 Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods.

Psa 102:13 **Thou shalt arise,** *and* have mercy upon Zion: for the time to favour her, yea, the set time, is come.

Psa 102:14 For thy servants take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof.

Psa 102:15 So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD, **and all the kings of the earth thy glory.**

Psa 102:16 When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory.

Psalm 18:6-8, Psalm 97:1-4, Psalm 50:3-4: The Lord Comes With Fire

There are several Bible prophecy passages which describe the Lord coming with fire, including Isaiah 30:27-28. Psalm 97:1-4, Psalm 50:3-4, and Psalm 18:6-8 appear to be relevant passages because they too describe the Lord coming with a devouring fire.

Isa 30:27 Behold, the name of the LORD cometh from far, burning *with* his anger, and the burden *thereof is* heavy: **his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire:**

Isa 30:28 And his breath, as an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity: and *there shall be* a bridle in the jaws of the

Psa 18:6 In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, *even* into his ears.

Psa 18:7 Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth.

people, causing *them* to err.

Psa 50:3 Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: **a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him.**

Psa 50:4 He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people.

Psa 18:8 There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it.

Psa 97:1 The LORD reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad *thereof*.

Psa 97:2 Clouds and darkness *are* round about him: righteousness and judgment *are* the habitation of his throne.

Psa 97:3 A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about.

Psa 97:4 His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled.

Psalm 2: Christ Defeats the Nations by Speaking

There are several Bible verses which relate to Christ defeating His enemies by speaking, including Revelation 19:15, 21, and Isaiah 11:4. Psalm 2 also describes how Christ will defeat the kings of the earth by speaking.

Psa 2:1 Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?

Psa 2:2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, *saying*,

Psa 2:3 Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us.

Psa 2:4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh:

Rev 19:15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

...

Rev 19:21 And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the

Isa 11:4 But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and **he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.**

the Lord shall have them in derision. fowls were filled with their flesh.

Psa 2:5 Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure.

...

Psa 2:9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Other chapters from the Book of Psalms which likely have End Times implications include:

Psalm 83
Psalm 79
Psalm 82
Psalm 45
Psalm 46
Psalm 9
Psalm 10
Psalm 68
Psalm 94
Psalm 96
Psalm 98
Psalm 99
Psalm 137
Psalm 110
Psalm 107

Or, more detailed (*will be part of a separate Ebook on Prophecy in the Bible*)

Psalm Prophecies	OT Scripture NT Fulfillment	
The Messiah would also be rejected by Gentiles.	Psalm 2:1	Acts 4:25-28
Political/religious leaders would conspire against the Messiah.	Psalm 2:2	Matthew 26:3-4 Mark 3:6
The Messiah would be King of the Jews.	Psalm 2:6	John 12:12-13

		John 18:32
The Messiah would be the Son of God.	Psalms 2:7a	Luke 1:31-35 Matthew 3:16-17 Hebrews 1:5-6
The Messiah would reveal that He was the Son of God.	Psalms 2:7b	John 9:35-37
The Messiah would be raised from the dead and be crowned King.	Psalms 2:7c	Acts 13:30-33 Romans 1:3-4
The Messiah would ask God for His inheritance.	Psalms 2:8a	John 17:4-24
The Messiah would have complete authority over all things.	Psalms 2:8b	Matthew 28:18 Hebrews 1:1-2
The Messiah would not acknowledge those who did not believe in Him.	Psalms 2:12	John 3:36
Infants would give praise to the Messiah.	Psalms 8:2	Matthew 21:15-16
The Messiah would have complete authority over all things.	Psalms 8:6	Matthew 28:18
The Messiah would be resurrected.	Psalms 16:8-10a	Matthew 28:6 Acts 2:25-32
The Messiah's body would not see corruption (natural decay).	Psalms 16:8-10b	Acts 13:35-37
The Messiah would be glorified into the presence of God.	Psalms 16:11	Acts 2:25-33
The Messiah would come for all people.	Psalms 18:49	Ephesians 3:4-6
The Messiah would cry out to God.	Psalms 22:1a	Matthew 27:46
The Messiah would be forsaken by God at His crucifixion.	Psalms 22:1b	Mark 15:34
The Messiah would pray without ceasing before His death.	Psalms 22:2	Matthew 26:38-39
The Messiah would be despised and rejected by His own.	Psalms 22:6	Luke 23:21-23
The Messiah would be made a mockery.	Psalms 22:7	Matthew 27:39
Unbelievers would say to the Messiah, "He trusted in God, let Him now deliver Him."	Psalms 22:8	Matthew 27:41-43
The Messiah would know His Father from childhood.	Psalms 22:9	Luke 2:40
The Messiah would be called by God while in the womb.	Psalms 22:10	Luke 1:30-33
The Messiah would be abandoned by His disciples.	Psalms 22:11	Mark 14:50

The Messiah would be encompassed by evil spirits.	Psalm 22:12-13	Colossians 2:15
The Messiah's body would emit blood & water.	Psalm 22:14a	John 19:34
The Messiah would be crucified.	Psalm 22:14b	Matthew 27:35
The Messiah would thirst while dying.	Psalm 22:15a	John 19:28
The Messiah would thirst just prior to His death.	Psalm 22:15b	John 19:30
The Messiah would be observed by Gentiles at His crucifixion.	Psalm 22:16a	Luke 23:36
The Messiah would be observed by Jews at His crucifixion.	Psalm 22:16b	Matthew 27:41-43
Both the Messiah's hands and feet would be pierced.	Psalm 22:16c	Matthew 27:38
The Messiah's bones would not be broken.	Psalm 22:17a	John 19:32-33
The Messiah would be viewed by many during His crucifixion.	Psalm 22:17b	Luke 23:35
The Messiah's garments would be parted among the soldiers.	Psalm 22:18a	John 19:23-24
The soldiers would cast lots for the Messiah's clothes.	Psalm 22:18b	John 19:23-24
The Messiah's atonement would enable believers to receive salvation.	Psalm 22:22	Hebrews 2:10-12 Matthew 12:50 John 20:14
The Messiah's enemies would stumble and fall.	Psalm 27:2	John 18:3-6
The Messiah would be accused by false witnesses.	Psalm 27:12	Matthew 26:59-61
The Messiah would cry out to God "Into thy hands I commend my spirit."	Psalm 31:5	Luke 23:46
There would be many attempts to kill the Messiah.	Psalm 31:13	Matthew 27:1
The Messiah would have no bones broken.	Psalm 34:20	John 19:32-33
The Messiah would be accused by many false witnesses.	Psalm 35:11	Mark 14:55-59
The Messiah would be hated without cause.	Psalm 35:19	John 18:19-23 John 15:24-25
The Messiah would be silent as a lamb before His accusers.	Psalm 38:13-14	Matthew 26:62-63
The Messiah would be God's sacrificial lamb for redemption of all mankind.	Psalm 40:6-8a	Hebrews 10:10-13
The Messiah would reveal that the Hebrew scriptures were written of Him.	Psalm 40:6-8b	Luke 24:44 John 5:39-40

The Messiah would do God's (His Father) will.	Psalm 40:7-8	John 5:30
The Messiah would not conceal His mission from believing people.	Psalm 40:9-10	Luke 4:16-21
The Messiah would be betrayed by one of His own disciples.	Psalm 41:9	Mark 14:17-18
The Messiah would communicate a message of mercy.	Psalm 45:2	Luke 4:22
The Messiah's throne would be eternal.	Psalm 45:6-7a	Luke 1:31-33 Hebrews 1:8-9
The Messiah would be God.	Psalm 45:6-7b	Hebrews 1:8-9
The Messiah would act with righteousness.	Psalm 45:6-7c	John 5:30
The Messiah would be betrayed by one of His own disciples.	Psalm 55:12-14	Luke 22:47-48
The Messiah would ascend back into heaven.	Psalm 68:18a	Luke 24:51 Ephesians 4:8
The Messiah would give good gifts unto believing men.	Psalm 68:18b	Matthew 10:1 Ephesians 4:7-11
The Messiah would be hated and rejected without cause.	Psalm 69:4	Luke 23:13-22 John 15:24-25
The Messiah would be condemned for God's sake.	Psalm 69:7	Mat. 26:65-67
The Messiah would be rejected by the Jews.	Psalm 69:8a	John 1:11
The Messiah's very own brothers would reject Him.	Psalm 69:8b	John 7:3-5
The Messiah would become angry due to unethical practices by the Jews in the temple.	Psalm 69:9a	John 2:13-17
The Messiah would be condemned for God's sake.	Psalm 69:9b	Romans 15:3
The Messiah's heart would be broken.	Psalm 69:20a	John 19:34
The Messiah's disciples would abandon Him just prior to His death.	Psalm 69:20b	Mark 14:33-41
The Messiah would be offered gall mingled with vinegar while dying.	Psalm 69:21a	Matthew 27:34
The Messiah would thirst while dying.	Psalm 69:21b	John 19:28
The potters field would be uninhabited (Field of Blood).	Psalm 69:25	Acts 1:16-20
The Messiah would teach in parables.	Psalm 78:2	Mat.13:34-35
The Messiah would be exalted to the right hand of God.	Psalm 80:17	Acts 5:31
The Messiah would come from the lineage	Psalm 89:3-4	Matthew 1:1

of David.

The Messiah would call God His Father.

Psalms 89:26

Matthew 11:27

The Messiah would be God's only
"begotten" Son.

Psalms 89:27

Mark 16:6

Colossians 1:18

Revelation 1:5

The Messiah would come from the lineage
of David.

Psalms 89:29

Matthew 1:1

The Messiah would come from the lineage
of David.

Psalms 89:35-
36

Matthew 1:1

The Messiah would be eternal.

Psalms
102:25-27a

Revelation 1:8

Hebrews 1:10-12

The Messiah would be the creator of all
things.

Psalms
102:25-27b

John 1:3

Ephesians 3:9

Hebrews 1:10-12

The Messiah would calm the stormy sea.

Psalms
107:28-29

Matthew 8:24-26

The Messiah would be accused by many
false witnesses.

Psalms 109:2

John 18:29-30

The Messiah would offer up prayer for His
enemies.

Psalms 109:4

Luke 23:34

The Messiah's betrayer (Judas) would have a
short life.

Psalms 109:8a

Acts 1:16-18

John 17:12

The Messiah's betrayer would be replaced by
another.

Psalms 109:8b

Acts 1:20-26

The Messiah would be mocked by many.

Psalms 109:25

Mark 15:29-30

The Messiah would be Lord and King.

Psalms 110:1a

Mat. 22:41-45

The Messiah would be exalted to the right
hand of God.

Psalms 110:1b

Mark 16:19

Mat. 22:41-46

The Messiah would be a Priest after the
order of Melchisedec.

Psalms 110:4

Hebrews 6:17-20

The Messiah would be exalted to the right
hand of God.

Psalms 110:5

1 Peter 3:21-22

The Messiah would be the "Stone" rejected
by the builders (Jews).

Psalms 118:22

Mat. 21:42-43

The Messiah would come in the name of the
Lord.

Psalms 118:26

Matthew 21:9

The Messiah would come from the lineage
of David.

Psalms 132:11

Matthew 1:1

The Messiah would come from the lineage
of David.

Psalms 132:17

Matthew 1:1

Luke 1:68-70

This is not a complete list of all the chapters from the Book of Psalms that have
End Times implications, but should it be enough (along with the tables above) to

demonstrate that the Book of Psalms is a book that students of Bible prophecy should not neglect. Further reading of value is the Dictionary of Biblical Prophecy and End Times by J. Daniel Hays; J. Scott Duvall and C. Marvin Pate (Publishers Zondervan.Com).

Outline of the Book of Psalms

Divisions:

The book of Psalms is itself divided into five books: Book 1 (1-41), Book 2 (42-72), Book 3 (73-89), Book 4 (90-106), and Book 5 (107-150). Each of the five books of the Psalms ends with a doxology. Traditional Jewish teaching and much Christian teaching link each of the five books to the five books of the Pentateuch. I have not found the teaching very convincing.

I. The Book of the Messiah. Psalms 1-41:

All but four are attributed to David (1, 2, 10, 33) and no other named writers are included in this group. This book is the most Messianic of the books, with Psalms 2, 8, 16, 20-24, 31, 34, 35, 40, 41 all mentioning the Messiah, clearly about the Messiah, or quoted in the New Testament as referencing the Messiah. Some see Psalm 1 as also Messianic. After the introductory Psalm 1, the book opens with the Messiah (Psalm 2) and closes with the Messiah (Psalm 41:9 see John 13:18). In the very center of the book are five Messianic Psalms, two describing His prayer (20-21) and three describing His past, present, and future work (22-24). The eighth Psalm from the beginning and the eighth Psalm from the end (34) are also both Messianic. The end of the middle Psalm (21) assures us of God's judgment. The bookends of this first book are: "Blessed is the man . . . Blessed is the LORD, the God of Israel."

II. The Book of Desire. Psalms 42-72:

This book is the most personal of the five books (Psalms 42-43, 51, 55, 57, 59, 60, 61, 63, 64, 66, 69, 70, 71). Of the 13 Psalms that provide us historical background for their origins, eight of them are in this book (51, 52, 54, 56-57, 59-60, 63). This book begins with despondency and a deep longing for God (Psalm 42) and ends with the reign of the King (Psalm 72). Psalm 45 contains the beautiful marriage song of the King. Psalm 46 sets forth the most beautiful song of trust. Psalm 51 powerfully displays confession and forgiveness. The end of the middle Psalm (58) presents God as judge. The bookends of this second book

are: “My soul pants for You, O God . . . Let the whole earth be filled with His glory.”

III. The Book of Israel. Psalms 73-89:

This book deals mostly with God’s dealings with His covenant people, Israel (74, 77-81, 83, 85, 87, 89). Psalm 73 is a great song about the folly of envying the wicked. Psalm 84 describes a heart longing to be with God. The end of the middle Psalm (82) is a cry for judgment. The bookends of this third book are: “Truly, God is good to Israel . . . Remember, Lord, the reproach of your servants . . . Your Messiah.”

IV. The Book of the Rule of God. Psalms 90-106:

This book contains the great enthronement Psalms, those songs devoted to the establishing of God as King. The book deals mostly with God’s rule and should be read in that light. Psalm 90 is His rule over our lives. Psalms 93, 95-99 are the enthronement Psalms. Psalm 94 is His rule over the wicked. Psalm 102 is the enduring rule of God. Psalm 103 is His kind rule over our frailty. Psalm 104 is His rule over nature. Psalms 105 and 106 is His rule in delivering Israel. Psalm 100 is a call to give thanks. The book opens with Moses’ great prayer (90) about life. The end of the middle Psalm (98) assures us that the LORD is coming to judge. The bookends of this fourth book are: “LORD, You have been our dwelling place in all generations . . . Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the Gentiles.”

V. The Book of Praise. Psalms 107-150:

Though each of the other four books address praise, this book triumphs praise. Two Hebrew words are used to describe praise: “hallel” meaning to boast and “yadah” meaning to throw or cast our gratitude to God. Psalms 107-109, 111-113, 115-119, 122, 135-136, 138-140, 142, 145-150 speak of the praise of the LORD. Psalms 113-118 are known as the Hallel Psalms (“Praise Psalms”) that were sung at Passover. This section is followed by Psalm 119, the great acrostic Psalm focused on the role of God’s Word. Psalms 120-134 are known as the Songs of Ascent (120-134) which were sung as the pilgrims ascended to Jerusalem. Psalm 135 calls for people to stand in the courts of the temple and bless the LORD. Psalm 136 recounts the history of God’s deliverance using the temple worship refrain (see 2 Chronicles 5:13). Psalm 137 makes this joyous time a sad memory in Babylon. This book then closes with seven Psalms of David (Psalms 138-145) and four Psalms calling us to Praise the LORD (146-150). Two Psalms are quoted by Christ about Himself (110 in Matthew

22:44 and 118 in Matthew 21:42). Psalms 128 and 129 form the middle of this last book. Psalm 128 begins: “Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD” and Psalm 129 ends with a call for judgment on those who hate Zion. The bookends of this fifth book are: “Oh, give thanks (yadah)to the LORD . . . Let everything that has breath praise (hallel) the LORD.”

At the centre of each Book is the core idea of God as judge. Also, at the center of the entire collection we find the same concept. In Psalm 75 we find God as judge (75:7) and the fear of God (76:7, 11). As we have learned, the fear of God is living in view of His judgment (Psalm 34:11-22; 145:19-20; Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). The Psalms center on the fear of God. Psalm 111:10 and 112:1 link the fear of the LORD with the praise of the LORD. Fear forms the breath that gives vitality to praise.

The Praise and Lament Psalms:

Most of the Psalms fall into one of two categories: praise or lament Psalms. The praise Psalms begin with an exhortation to praise or a proclamation of praise. Following this call to praise, the Psalmist lists the reasons why we should praise. Sometimes the reasons are based on who God is. Sometimes they are based on what God has done.

The lament Psalms generally follow a more complex structure. Not every lament Psalm contains all of these elements, but the basic structure is:

- Opening Cry
- Lament Proper (This is the Complaint generally involving 3 parts)
 1. I am hurting;
 2. You have not come; and
 3. They (the enemies) are winning. This is what the Psalmist is experiencing.
- Confession of Trust
- Petition (generally involving 3 strong imperatives that correspond with the Complaint)
 1. Listen to me;
 2. save me;
 3. punish them.
- Motivations for God to respond
- Vow to Praise God.

[Note: this structure comes from Dr. Ronald Allen, Professor at Dallas Theological Seminary]

Like Job, the lament Psalms give voice to our struggles when our theology of God does not meet our experiences in life. The Psalms are raw and refreshing. We may read the Psalms and gasp. How can the Psalmist say that? Yet the Psalmist is not inhibited in expressing his anguish to God. These are cries or prayers to God. The deepness of emotional despair, nevertheless, remains always enshrouded in a will to hope in God. Psalms 42-43 expresses this vividly. In the midst of troubles and dark despair, we need to command ourselves to hope in the LORD. It is the antidote to despair.

Conclusion:

The Psalms form the expression of the soul of man in relationship with God. In every emotion of life, the Psalms give expressions to that relationship. When in despair and our cries seem lost, we learn to count on a God who will see, hear, and respond. When in celebration, we find a God who informs and enriches our celebration. The Psalms teach us to let God's Word live in us richly (Colossians 3:16). The Psalms are for us to enjoy, contemplate, learn about God, and grow our relationship with Him. God is for the righteous. He is our God (Psalm 63).

Key Idea:

Praise the Worthy God. We boast about God (hallel) and we verbally throw or cast our gratefulness to Him (yadah). "Hallel" is found in the Psalms 89 times out of a total appearance in the Old Testament of 150 times. "Yadah" is found 66 times in the Psalms and 111 times in the entirety of the Old Testament. Interestingly, each word is found 59% of its time in the book of Psalms. Together, 155 times out of 261 times these words are found in the Old Testament, they are in the Psalms. Psalms is about praise and the God who is worthy of praise.

Key Passage: Psalm 117 (King James Version 1611)

1: O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people.
2: For his merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the LORD endureth for ever. Praise ye the LORD.

The Davidic Psalter

The Book of Psalms -- otherwise known as Psalterium Davidicum ("The Davidic Psalter"), Liber Psalmorum (Vulgate), Tehillim (Hebrew, "The Book of Praises"), Psalterion (Greek), Mazmore (Syriac Bible), etc. -- is a Book of poems -- lyrics, really -- of set structure meant to be chanted (the word "psalterion" implies that they may once have been accompanied by a stringed

instrument). As music is designed to appeal to the heart, so are the Psalms, and their words are full of emotional content and sensitive imagery. From wrenching contrition to unshakable trust in His mercy, from sorrow to elation, the Davidic Psalter leaves no heartstring unplucked. St. Athanasius (A.D. 296-373), writing to Marcellinus, described them like this:

And, among all the books, the Psalter has certainly a very special grace, a choiceness of quality well worthy to be pondered; for, besides the characteristics which it shares with others, it has this peculiar marvel of its own, that within it are represented and portrayed in all their great variety the movements of the human soul. It is like a picture, in which you see yourself portrayed, and seeing, may understand and consequently form yourself upon the pattern given. Elsewhere in the Bible you read only that the Law commands this or that to be done, you listen to the Prophets to learn about the Saviour's coming, or you turn to the historical books to learn the doings of the kings and holy men; but in the Psalter, besides all these things, you learn about yourself. You find depicted in it all the movements of your soul, all its changes, its ups and downs, its failures and recoveries.

What did these soulful songs sound like when they were sung at Temple and in synagogues -- even by Jesus and His Apostles? Like the mother to Gregorian and Byzantine chant, which spring from Old Testament chant that is at least 3,000 years old. Consider: when our Lord recounted the Hallel as He instituted the Eucharist, He most likely would have sounded much like our priests do today. Our Hebrew forebears chanted the Psalms, even as we do now, both responsively (groups chanting alternating verses) and antiphonally (with repetition of the first verse).

Organising the Psalms

The 150 Psalms that make up the Psalter are often grouped into 5 Books, like and related to the 5 Books of Torah, each of which may be described as having an historical relevance:

Book I	1-40. Doxology: Psalm 40:14	Genesis David's conflict with Saul
Book II	41-71. Doxology Psalm 71:18-20	Exodus David's Kingship

Book III	72-88. Doxology: Psalm 88:53	Leviticus The Assyrian Crisis
Book IV	89-105. Doxology: Psalm 105:48	Numbers Destruction of the Temple and Exile
Book V	106-150. No doxology	Deuteronomy Praise and the New Era

Aquinas rejected the idea of their being grouped into 5 Books, mentioning in his "Commentary on the Psalms" that others see the Psalms grouped into perfect thirds:

The third distinction is that the Psalms are distinguished into three groups of fifty: and this distinction takes in the three fold state of the faithful people: namely the state of penitence; and to this the first fifty are ordered, which conclude in Have mercy on me, O God, which is the Psalm of penitence. The second concerns justice, and this consists in judgement, and concludes in Psalm 100, "Mercy, and justice." The third concludes the praise of eternal glory, and so it ends with "Let every spirit praise the Lord."

The point is that they can be grouped in many different ways, by theme or poetic style. For example:

Wisdom Psalms 35, 36, 48, 72, 111, 126, 127, 132

Royal Psalms 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 144

Laments Individual: 3, 21, 30, 38, 41, 56, 70, 119, 138, 141

Corporate: 2, 44, 80, 94, 137 2, 43, 79, 93, 136

Thanksgiving Individual: 17, 29, 31, 33, 39, 65, 91, 114, 115, 117, 137

Corporate: 64, 66, 74, 106, 123, 135

Enthronement 23, 28, 46, 92, 94-98

Praise 8, 18, 32, 66, 99, 102, 103, 110, 113, 116, 144-148

Acrostics 9, 24, 33, 36, 110, 111, 118, 144

Grouping by Liturgical Use

The Psalms are grouped by their liturgical use, too. The ancient Hebrews chanted Psalms 119 to 133 (known as the "Gradual Psalms," "Songs of Ascent," "Songs of Degrees," or "Pilgrim Songs") when travelling to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the Spring; Pentecost in Summer; and the Atonement and Tabernacles in Fall. Psalms 112 to 117 are known as "Hallel" (also the "Common Hallel" or "Egyptian Hallel") and are chanted on Passover night, Pentecost, the Feast of the Unleavened Bread and the Feast of Booths.

According to the Jewish Encyclopedia's view, the Talmud states that:

...psalms were sung by the Levites immediately after the daily libation of wine; and every liturgical psalm was sung in three parts (Suk. iv. 5). During the intervals between the parts the sons of Aaron blew three different blasts on the trumpet (Tamid vii. 3). The daily psalms are named in the order in which they were recited: on Sunday, xxiv.; Monday, xlviii.; Tuesday, lxxxii.; Wednesday, xciv.; Thursday, lxxxi.; Friday, xciii.; and Sabbath, xcii. (Tamid l.c.).

This is precisely how the Church groups Psalms for the Divine Office (see table below) -- based on the day of the week, but with the Psalms spread out throughout the week such that, in a week's time, the entire Psalter is prayed (Psalm 94 -- the Invitatorium -- is prayed each day as the opening prayer of the Office).

Another Christian grouping of Psalms are those seven called "Penitential" -- Psalms 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, 142. These Psalms -- among them are the "Miserère" (Ps. 50) and the "De Profundis" (Ps. 129) -- are recited during Lent by order of Innocent III (A.D. 1198-1216). St. Augustine (d. A.D. 430) was so taken by these beautiful Psalms that he asked that a monk write them in large letters near his bed so he could read them as he lay dying.

And, of course, the Psalms fill the Mass, both in its Ordinary and Propers. The *Júdica Me* (Ps. 42) opens the Mass, the *Aspérge*s consists of parts of Ps. 50, at the *Lavabo* we hear Psalm 25:6-12, the *Introit* and *Gradual* (and sometimes the *Offertory* and *Communion* prayers) are Psalms, etc.

For a plan to read the entire Psalter, you can read them according to the schedule used in the Divine Office, starting each day's readings with Psalm 94. For inspiration, read the rest of St. Athanasius's letter next, in which he tells his friend, Marcellinus, of the beauty and usefulness of the Davidic Psalter.

Jewish Information



Headings

Biblical Data; Hymns of Praise; Elegies; Didactic Psalms; Literary Form; Religious and Ethical Content;

In Rabbinical Literature

Composition of the Psalter; Liturgical Songs; Hymn-Book of Second Temple.

Critical View

Didactic Psalms; The "Lamed Auctoris"; Date of Psalter; Reflection of History; Reflex of Politics; Pilgrim Songs; Musical Accompaniment.

Name derived from the Greek ψαλμός (plural ψαλμοί), which signifies primarily playing on a stringed instrument, and secondarily the composition played or the song accompanied on such an instrument. In the Septuagint (Codex Alexandrinus) ψαλτήριον is used, which denotes a large stringed instrument, also a collection of songs intended to be sung to the accompaniment of strings (harp). These terms are employed to translate the Hebrew "mizmor" and "tehillim." The exact derivation and meaning of the former are uncertain. It would seem that, etymologically denoting "paragraph," it owes its signification

of "psalm," "song," or "hymn" to the circumstance that it is found prefixed to the superscriptions of a number of psalms. The word "tehillim" is a plural, not occurring in Biblical Hebrew, from the singular "tehillah" = "song of praise." It is thus a fitting title for the collection of songs found in the "Ketubim" or Hagiographa (the third main division of the Hebrew canon), and more fully described as "Sefer Tehillim," or the "Book of Psalms." "Tehillim" is also contracted to "tillim" (Aramaic, "tillin").

Biblical Data

In the printed Hebrew Bible the Book of Psalms is the first of the Ketubim; but it did not always occupy this position, having formerly been preceded by Ruth. (B. B. 14b; Tos. to. B. B. 1.c.). Jerome, however ("Prologus Galeatus"), has another order, in which Job is first and the Psalms second, while Sephardic manuscripts assign to Chronicles the first and to the Psalms the second place (comp. 'Ab. Zarah 19a). The Book of Psalms is one of the three poetic books denoted as (EMaT = Job [Iyyob], Proverbs [Mishle], and Psalms [Tehillim]) and having an accentuation (see Accents in Hebrew) of their own.

The Sefer Tehillim consists of 150 psalms divided into five books, as follows: book i. = Ps. i.-xli. ii. = Ps. xlii.-lxxii.; iii. = Ps. lxxiii.-lxxxix.; iv. = Ps. xc.-cvi.; v. = Ps. cvii.-cl., the divisions between these books being indicated by doxologies (Ps. xli. 14 [A. V. 13]; lxxii. 19 [18-19]; lxxxix. 53 [52]; cvi. 48). The conclusion of book ii. is still further marked by the gloss = "The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended." Of the 150 psalms 100 are ascribed, in their superscriptions, to various authors by name: one, Ps. xc., to Moses; seventy-three to David; two, lxxii. and cxxvii., to Solomon; twelve, 1. and lxxiii. to lxxxiii., to Asaph; one, lxxxviii., to Heman; one, lxxxix., to Ethan; ten to the sons of Korah (eleven if lxxxviii., attributed also to Heman, is assigned to them). In the Septuagint ten more psalms are credited to David. Sixteen psalms have other (mostly musical) headings. According to their contents, the Psalms may be grouped as follows: (1) hymns of praise, (2) elegies, and (3) didactic psalms.

Hymns of Praise

These glorify God, His power, and His loving-kindness manifested in nature or shown to Israel, or they celebrate the Torah, Zion, and the Davidic kingdom. In this group are comprised the psalms of gratitude, expressing thankfulness for help extended and refuge found in times of danger and distress. The group embraces about one-third of the Psalter.

Elegies

These lend voice to feelings of grief at the spread of iniquity, the triumph of the wicked, the sufferings of the just, the "humble," or the "poor," and the abandonment of Israel. In this category are comprehended the psalms of supplication, the burden of which is fervent prayer for the amelioration of conditions, the restoration of Israel to grace, and the repentance of sinners. The line of demarcation between elegy and supplication is not sharply drawn. Lamentation often concludes with petition; and prayer, in turn, ends in lamentation. Perhaps some of this group ought to be considered as forming a distinct category by themselves, and to be designated as psalms of repentance or penitential hymns; for their key-note is open confession of sin and transgression prompted by ardent repentance, preluding the yearning for forgiveness. These are distinct from the other elegies in so far as they are inspired by consciousness of guilt and not by the gnawing sense of unmerited affliction.

Didactic Psalms

These, of quieter mood, give advice concerning righteous conduct and speech, and caution against improper behavior and attitude. Of the same general character, though aimed at a specific class or set of persons, are the imprecatory psalms, in which, often in strong language, shortcomings are censured and their consequences expatiated upon, or their perpetrators are bitterly denounced. Most of the 150 psalms may, without straining the context and content of their language, be assigned to one or another of these three (or, with their subdivisions, seven) groups. Some scholars would add another class, viz., that of the king-psalms, e.g., Ps. ii., xviii., xx., xxi., xlv., lxi., lxxii., and others. Though in these king-psalms there is always allusion to a king, they as a rule will be found to be either hymns of praise, gratitude, or supplication, or didactic songs. Another principle of grouping is concerned with the character of the speaker. Is it the nation that pours out its feelings, or is it an individual who unburdens his soul? Thus the axis of cleavage runs between national and individual psalms.

Literary Form

In form the Psalms exhibit in a high degree of perfection charm of language and wealth of metaphor as well as rhythm of thought, i.e., all of the variety of parallelism. The prevailing scheme is the couplet of two corresponding lines. The triplet and quatrain occur also, though not frequently. For the discussion of a more regular metrical system in the Psalms than this parallelism reference is made to J. Ley ("Die Metrischen Formen der Hebräischen Poesie," 1866; "Grundzüge des Rhythmus der Hebräischen Poesie," 1875), Bickell ("Carmina V. T. Metrice," 1882; and in "Z. D. M. G." 1891-94), Grimme ("Abriss der Biblisch-Hebräischen Metrik," ib. 1896-97), and Ed. Sievers ("Studien zur

Hebräischen Metrik," Leipsic, 1901; see also "Theologische Rundschau," 1905, viii. 41 et seq.). The refrain may be said to constitute one of the salient verbal features of some of the psalms (comp. Ps. xlii. 5, 11; xliii. 5; xlvi. 7, 11; lxxx. 3, 7, 19; cvii. 8, 15, 21, 31; cxxxvi., every half-verse of which consists of "and his goodness endureth forever"). Several of the psalms are acrostic or alphabetic in their arrangement, the succession of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet occurring in various positions-the beginning of every verse, every hemistich, or every couplet; in the last-mentioned case the letters may occur in pairs, i.e., in each couplet the two lines may begin with the same letter. Ps. cix. has throughout eight verses beginning with the same letter. Occasionally the scheme is not completely carried out (Ps. ix.-x.), one letter appearing in the place of another (see also Ps. xxv., xxxvii., cxi., cxii.).

Religious and Ethical Content.

The religious and ethical content of the Psalms may be summarized as a vivid consciousness of God's all-sustaining, guiding, supreme power. The verbal terms are often anthropomorphic; the similes, bold (e.g., God is seated in the heavens with the earth as His footstool; He causes the heavens to bow down; He scatters the enemies of His people; He spreads a table). God's justice and mercy are the dominant notes in the theology of the Psalms. His loving-kindness is the favorite theme of the psalmists. God is the Father who loves and pities His children. He lifts up the lowly and defeats the arrogant. His kingdom endures for ever. He is the Holy One. The heavens declare His glory: they are His handiwork. The religious interpretation of nature is the intention of many of these hymns of praise (notably Ps. viii., xix., xxix., lxxv., xciii., civ.). Man's frailty, and withal his strength, his exceptional position in the sweep of creation, are other favorite themes. Sin and sinners are central to some psalms, but even so is the well-assured confidence of the God-fearing. Repentance is the path-pointer to the forgiving God. Ps. 1., for instance, rings with an Isaianic protest against sacrificial ritualism. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. Often the nation is made to speak; yet the "I" in the Psalms is not always national. Individualization of religion is not beyond the horizon. Nor is it true that the national spirit alone finds expression and that the perfect man pictured is always and necessarily conceived of as a son of Israel. The universalistic note is as often struck. The imprecations of such psalms as cix. are not demonstrations of the vindictiveness of narrow nationalism. Read in the light of the times when they were written (see Psalms, Critical View), these fanatical utterances must be understood as directed against Israelites-not non-Jews. Ps. xv. is the proclamation of an ethical religion that disregards limitations of birth or blood. Again, the "poor" and the "meek" or "humble," so often mentioned-"poverty" or humility being found even among God's attributes (xviii. 35)-are Israelites, the "servants of Yhwh," whose sufferings have evoked Deutero-Isaiah's description

(Isa. liii:). The "return of Israel" and the establishment of God's reign of justice contemporaneously with Israel's restoration are focal in the eschatology of the Psalms, treated as a whole. But perhaps this method of regarding the Psalms as virtually reflecting identical views must be abandoned, the reasons for which are detailed in Psalms, Critical View.

In Rabbinical Literature:

The richest in content and the most precious of the three large Ketubim (Ber. 57a), the Sefer Tehillim is regarded as a second Pentateuch, whose virtual composer was David, often likened to Moses (Midr. Teh. ch. i.). "Moses gave [Israel] the five books of the Torah, and to correspond with them [] David gave them the Sefer Tehillim, in which also there are five books" (ib.). Its sacred character as distinct from such books as the "Sifre Homerns" (works of Hermes, not Homer) is explicitly emphasized (Midr. Teh. l.c.; Yalk. ii. 613, 678). The Psalms are essentially "songs and laudations" (). According to Rab, the proper designation for the book would be "Halleluyah" (Midr. Teh. l.c.), because that term comprehends both the Divine Name and its glorification, and for this reason is held to be the best of the ten words for praise occurring in the Psalms. These ten words, corresponding in number to the ten men who had a part in composing the Psalms, are: "berakah" (benediction); Hallel; "tefillah" (prayer); "shir" (song); "mizmor" (psalm); "neginah" (melody); "nazeah" (to play on an instrument); "ashre" (happy, blessed); "hodot" (thanks); "halleluyah" (ib.).

Composition of the Psalter

Ten men had a share in the compilation of this collection, but the chief editor was David (B. B. 15a; Midr. Teh. i.). Of the ten names two variant lists are given, namely: (1) Adam, Moses, Asaph, Heman, Abraham, Jeduthun, Melchizedek, and three sons of Korah; (2) Adam, Moses, Asaph, Heman, Abraham, Jeduthun, David, Solomon, the three sons of Korah counted as one, and Ezra (B. B. 14b; Cant. R. to verse iv. 4; Eccl. R. to vii. 19; sometimes for Abraham, Ethan ha-Ezrahi is substituted). Adam's psalms are such as refer to cosmogony, creation. Ps. v., xix., xxiv., xcii. (Yalk. ii. 630) were said to have been written by David, though Adam was worthy to have composed them.

The division into five books known to the Rabbis corresponded with that observed in modern editions. The order of the Psalms was identical with that of modern recensions; but the Rabbis suspected that it was not altogether correct. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi is reported to have desired to make alterations (Midr. Teh. xxxvii.). Moses was credited with the authorship of eleven psalms, xc.-c. (ib. xc.). They were excluded from the Torah because they were not composed in the prophetic spirit (ib.). Ps. xxx. ("at the dedication of the house") was ascribed to David as well as to Ezra (ib. xxx.). Twenty-two times is "ashre"

found in the Psalms; and this recalls the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet (ib. i.). "Barki nafshi" occurs five times in Ps. ciii., recalling the analogy with the Pentateuch (ib. ciii.). Ps. xxix. names Yhwh eighteen times, in analogy with the eighteen benedictions of the Shemoneh 'Esreh (ib. xxix.). Ps. cxxxvi. is called "Hallel ha-Gadol" (Pes. 118a), to which, according to some, the songs "of degrees" also belong. The ordinary "Hallel" was composed of Ps. cxiii-cxviii. (Pes. 117a). The Masorah divides the book into nineteen "sedarim," the eleventh of these beginning with Ps. lxxviii. 38 (see Masoretic note at end of printed text).

One Palestinian authority, R. Joshua b. Levi, counts only 147 psalms (Yer. Shah. 15). According to Grätz ("Psalem," p. 9), this variance was due to the effort to equalize the number of psalms with that of the Pentateuchal pericopes according to the triennial cycle. Ps. i. and ii. were counted as one in Babylon (Ber. 9b, 10a; as in the LXX.). Ps. x. 15 belonged to ix. (Meg. 17b). The concluding verse of Ps. xix. was added to Ps. xviii. (Ber. 9b); xlii. and xliii. were counted as one (see Fürst, "Kanon," p. 71). Ps. lxxviii. was divided into two parts comprising verses 1 to 37 and 38 to 72 respectively (Kid. 30a). Ps. cxiv. and cxv. were united (see Kimḥi, commentary on Ps. cxiv.), and cxviii. was divided into two. Psalms whose authors were not known, or the occasion for whose composition was not indicated, were described as "orphans" (; 'Ab. Zarah 24b).

Liturgical Songs

According to Talmudic tradition, psalms were sung by the Levites immediately after the daily libation of wine; and every liturgical psalm was sung in three parts (Suk. iv. 5). During the intervals between the parts the sons of Aaron blew three different blasts on the trumpet (Tamid vii. 3). The daily psalms are named in the order in which they were recited: on Sunday, xxiv.; Monday, xlvi.; Tuesday, lxxxii.; Wednesday, xciv.; Thursday, lxxxi.; Friday, xciii.; and Sabbath, xcii. (Tamid l.c.). This selection shows that it was made at a time when Israel was threatened with disaster (see Rashi on Suk. 55a). The fifteen "Songs of Degrees" were sung by the Levites at the Feast of Tabernacles, at the festive drawing of water. Ps. cxxxv. and cxxxvi. were recited antiphonally by the officiating liturgist and the people. As New-Year psalms, lxxxi. and the concluding verses of xxix. were used (R. H. 30b). Those designated for the semiholy days of Sukkot are enumerated in Suk. 55a. Massek. Soferim xviii. 2 names those assigned for Passover. At New Moon a certain psalm (number not given in the Talmud) was sung in the Temple (Suk. 55a); Soferim names Ps. cv. with the concluding verses of civ. For Ḥanukkah Ps. xxx. is reserved (Soferim xviii. 2). From Soṭah ix. 10 (see Tosefta ad loc.) it is apparent that at one time Ps. xlv. constituted a part of the Temple morning liturgy, while xxx. was sung during the offering of the First-Fruits. The same psalm, as well as iii. and xci.,

was sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments on the occasion of the enlargement of Jerusalem (Shebu. 14a).

Hymn-Book of Second Temple

Critical View:

The Book of Psalms may be said to be the hymn-book of the congregation of Israel during the existence of the Second Temple, though not every psalm in the collection is of a character to which this designation may apply. By earlier critics advancing this view of the nature of the Psalms it was held that they were hymns sung in the Temple either by the Levites or by the people. Later scholars have modified this opinion in view of the circumstance that the participation of the people in the Temple ritual was very slight and also because the contents of many of the psalms are such that their recitation at sacrificial functions is not very probable (e.g., Ps. xl. and l., which have a certain anti-sacrificial tendency). While B. Jacob (in Stade's "Zeitschrift," 1897, xvii.) insists that the Psalter is a hymn-book for the congregation assisting at or participating in the sacrificial rite, and as such must contain also liturgical songs intended for individuals who had to bring offerings on certain occasions, others maintain that, while a number of the hymns undoubtedly were of sacerdotal import and, consequently, were intended to be sung in the Temple, many were written for intonation at prayer in the synagogue. In this connection the determination of the reference in the so-called "I" psalms is of importance. The discovery of the Hebrew text of Ecclesiasticus (Sirach) has caused Nöldeke (Stade's "Zeitschrift," 1900, xx.), on the strength of the observation that in Ecclus. (Sirach) li. 2-29 the "I" refersto Ben Sira, to urge that the "I" psalms must similarly be construed as individual confessions. The traditional view was that David, the reputed author of most of these "I" psalms, was in them unbosoming his own feelings and relating his own experiences. It is more probable, however, that, while the "I" in some instances may have its individual significance, on the whole this personal pronoun has reference to the "congregation of Israel" or to a circle or set of congregants at prayer, the "pious," the "meek," the "righteous." The metrical reconstruction of the Psalms (see Baethgen, "Commentar," 3d ed.) promises to throw light on this problem, as the assumption is well grounded that hymns written for or used on public liturgical occasions had a typical metrical scheme of their own (comp. "Theologische Rundschau," viii., Feb., 1905). At all events, some of the psalms must have served at private devotion (e.g., Ps. cxli.), as, indeed, the custom of hymn-singing at night-time by some of the pious is alluded to (ib. lix., xcii., cxix., cxlix.).

Didactic Psalms

On the other hand, many of the didactic psalms remind one of the general type of gnomic anthologies. It seems more likely that these were recited, not sung, and were learned by heart for ethical instruction and guidance. That the "alphabetical" psalms were not intended originally for liturgical uses may be inferred at least from Ps. cxi. Most of this class reflect the study-room of the scholar, and lack entirely the spontaneity of the worshipful spirit. There are good reasons for regarding Ps. i. as a prologue, prefaced to the whole collection by its latest editors, who were not priests (Sadducees), but scribes (Pharisees) interested in the rise and establishment of synagogal worship as against the sacerdotal liturgy of the Temple. If so regarded, Ps. i. reveals the intention of the editors to provide in this collection a book of instruction as well as a manual of prayer.

The existing Psalter is a compilation of various collections made at various times. The division into several parts was not in every case altogether due to a desire to imitate the structure of the Pentateuch. Books i. (Ps. i.-lxi.), ii. (Ps. lxii.-lxxii.), and iii. (Ps. lxxiii.-lxxxix.) are marked as separate collections by doxologies, a fact which points to their separate compilation. The doxology which now divides books iv. and v. after Ps. cvi. has the appearance of being the beginning of another psalm (comp. I. Chron. xvi., where it occurs at the close of the interpolation verses 8 to 36). It is impossible to determine the date at which these older collections may have been put together. Book i., containing "David" psalms (originally without Ps. i. and ii.), may have been the first to be compiled. In books ii. and iii. (Ps. lxii.-lxxxix.) several older and smaller compilations seem to be represented, and that, too, in some disorder. The (a) "David" hymns (ὕμνοι = ; ib. li.-lxxii.) are clearly distinct from the (b) songs of the sons of Korah (xlii.-xlix.), (c) "Asaph" songs (l., lxxiii.-lxxxiii.), and (d) later supplements of promiscuous psalms (lxxxiv.-lxxxix.). It is noteworthy that in the "David" hymns duplicates of psalms are found, incorporated also in book i. (Ps. liii. = xiv.; lxx. = xl. 14-18; lxxi. 1-3 = xxxi. 2-4), while lvii. 8 et seq. is duplicated in book v. (cviii. 2-6). Another peculiarity of this book is the use of "Elohim" for "Yhwh," except in the supplement (lxxxiv.-lxxxix.). Comparison of the texts of the duplicate psalms, as well as the circumstance that these duplicates occur, indicates the freedom with which such collections were made, and suggests that many collections were in existence, each with variant content. Book iv. is distinct in so far as it contains, with the exception of three psalms (xc. "of Moses"; ci., ciii. "of David"; but in the Septuagint nine more), only anonymous ones. The character of the doxology (see above) suggests that this book was

separated from the following only to carry out the analogy with the Pentateuch. Books iv. and v. are characterized by the absence of "musical" superscriptions and instructions. In book v. the group comprising cvii. to cix. is easily recognized as not organically connected with that composed of cxx.-cxxxiv. It is possible that the liturgical character and use of cxiii. to cxviii. (the [Egyptian] "Hallel") had necessitated the redaction of the "Hallel" psalms separately. The "Songs of Degrees" (see below) must have constituted at one time a series by themselves. The metrical arrangement is the same in all, with the exception of cxxxii. The rest of book v. is composed of loose "Halleluyah" psalms, into which have been inserted "David" psalms (cxxxviii.-cxlv.) and an old folk-song (cxxxvii.).

The "Lamed Auctoris"

As to who were the compilers of these distinct collections it has been suggested that an inference might be drawn in the case of the psalms marked "to the sons of Korah" or "to Asaph, Heman, Ethan, Jeduthun," respectively. But the prefixed to the superscription in these cases is plainly not a "lamed auctoris," the names being those of the leaders of the choir-gilds (established, according to Chronicles, by David). The headings in which occurs merely indicate that the hymns were usually sung by the choristers known as "sons of Korah," etc., or that the psalm constituting a part of the repertoire of the singers so named was to be sung according to a fixed melody introduced by them. These choir-masters, then, had collected their favorite hymns, and, in consequence, these continued to be named after their collector and to be sung according to the melody introduced by the gild. It has also been urged as explaining the terms ("unto David," "unto Moses") that a certain melody was known by that term, or a collection happened to be labeled in that way. It is, however, manifest that in some instances the superscription admits of no other construction than that it is meant to name the author of the psalm (Moses, for instance, in Ps. xc.), though such expressions as "David song," "Zion song" = "Yhwh song" may very well have come into vogue as designations of sacred as distinguished from profane poems and strains. Still, one must not forget that these superscriptions are late additions. The historical value of the note (= "unto David") is not greater than that of others pretending to give the occasion when and the circumstances under which the particular psalm was composed. The variants in these superscriptions in the versions prove them to be late interpolations, reflecting the views of their authors.

Date of Psalter

By tradition David was regarded as the writer of most of the psalms, even the other names occurring in the captions being construed to be those of singers under his direction (David Kimhi, Commentary on Psalms, Preface). He was held to be also the editor of the Biblical Book of Psalms. But this ascription of

authorship to him is due to the tendency to connect with the name of a dominating personality the chief literary productions of the nation. Thus Moses figures as the lawgiver, and the author of the Pentateuch; Solomon, as the "wise" man and, as such, the writer of the Wisdom books; David, as the singer and, in this capacity, as the composer of hymns and as the collector of the Psalms as far as they are not his own compositions.

When the Book of Psalms first assumed its present form is open to discussion. Certain it is that the New Testament and Josephus presuppose the existence of the Biblical Psalter in the form in which it is found in the canon. This fact is further corroborated by the date of the so-called "Psalms of Solomon." These are assigned to about 68 B.C.; a fact which indicates that at that period no new psalms could be inserted in the Biblical book, which by this time must have attained permanent and fixed form as the Book of Psalms of David. It is safest then to assign the final compilation of the Biblical book to the first third of the century immediately preceding the Christian era.

Concerning the date of the two psalms lxxix. and cxlvi., I Maccabees furnishes a clue. In I Mace. vii. 17, Ps. lxxix. 2 is quoted, while cxlvi. 4 is utilized in I Macc. ii. 63. These psalms then were known to a writer living in the time of the Hasmonean rulers. He construed Ps. lxxix. as applying to the time of Alcimus. As remarked above, the historical superscriptions are worthless for the purpose of fixing the chronology, even if the concession be made that some of these pretendedly historical notes antedate the final compilation of the Psalter and were taken from the historical romances relating the lives of the nation's heroes, in which, according to prevailing ancient literary custom, poetry was introduced to embellish prose (comp. Ex. xv.; I Sam. ii.), as indeed Ps. xviii. is found also in II Sam. xxii.

Reflection of History

By comparison with what is known of the events of Jewish internal and external history during the last centuries before the destruction of the Second Temple, critical scholars have come to the conclusion that the political and religious circumstances and conflicts of these turbulent times are reflected in by far the greater number of psalms. Most of the 150 in the Biblical book, if not all of them, are assigned a post-exilic origin. Not one among competent contemporaneous scholars seriously defends the Davidic authorship of even a single psalm; and very few of the recent commentators maintain the pre-exilic character of one or the other song in the collection. Of exilic compositions Ps. cxxxvii. is perhaps the only specimen. To the Persian period some psalms might be assigned, notably the "nature" psalms (e.g., viii., xix.), as expressive of monotheism's opposition to dualism. But there is no proof for this assumption. Still a goodly number of psalms must have been composed in pre-Maccabean

years. Some psalms presuppose the existence and inviolability of the Temple and the Holy City (for instance, xlv., xlvi., lxxvi.). Ps. iii., iv., xi., and lxii. might reflect the confidence of pious priests before the Maccabean disturbances.

Reflex of Politics

But it is obvious that other psalms refer to the trickery and treachery of the house of Tobias (Ps. lxii.). The Maccabean revolution-with its heroism on the one hand, its cowardice on the other, its victories, and its defeats-has supplied many a hymn of faith and defiance and joy. The and -the "faithful," the "righteous," the "meek"-find voice to praise God for His help and to denounce the "wicked," the foreign nations that have made common cause with Syria (see lxxiv., lxxxiii., cxviii., and cxlix.). Ps. xlv. and lxxvii., point to events after the death of Judas Maccabeus; Ps. lv. and others seem to deal with Alcimus. The establishment of the Hasmonean dynasty on the throne and the conflicts between Pharisees (nationalists and democrats) and Sadducees (the representatives of aristocratic sacerdotalism) have left their impress on other hymns (Ps. ex. 1-4, "Shim'on" in acrostic). Some of the psalms are nothing less than the pronouncements of the Pharisees (ix., x., xiv., lvi., lviii.). Dates can not be assigned to the greater number of psalms, except in so far as their content betrays their character as Temple or synagogal hymns, as eschatological constructions, or as apocalyptic renderings of ancient history or of mythology.

Synagogal liturgy and strictly regulated Temple ceremonial are productions of the Maccabean and post-Maccabean conflicts. Apocalyptic ecstasy, didactic references to past history, and Messianic speculations point to the same centuries, when foreign oppression or internal feuds led the faithful to predict the coming glorious judgment. The "royal" or "king" psalms belong to the category of apocalyptic effusions. It is not necessary to assume that they refer to a ruling king or monarch. The Messianic king warring with the "nations"-another apocalyptic incident-is central in these psalms. The "'Aniyim" and the "'Anawim" are the "meek" as opposed to the "Gewim" and "'Azim" (which readings must often be adopted for "Goyim" and "'Ammim"), the "proud" and "insolent." The former are the (Pharisaic) pious nationalists battling against the proud (Sadducean) violators of God's law; but in their fidelity they behold the coming of the King of Glory, the Messianic Ruler, whose advent will put to flight and shame Israel's foreign and internal foes.

Pilgrim Songs

The "Songs of Degrees" are pilgrim songs, which were sung by the participants in the processions at the three pilgrim festivals; all other explanations are fanciful. David Kimḥi in his commentary quotes the usual interpretation that these, songs were sung by the Levites standing on the fifteen steps between the

court of the women and that of the Israelites. But he also suggests that they refer to the post-exilic redemption, being sung by those that "ascend" from captivity. In fact, Kīmhī often reveals a very clear perception of the psalms of the post-exilic origin.

The text is often corrupt. It contains interpolations, marginal glosses transposed into the body of psalms, quotations not in the original, liturgical glosses, notes, and intentional alterations. Consonantal interchanges abound. Many of the psalms are clearly fragmentary torsos; others, as clearly, are composed of two or more disjointed parts drawn from other psalms without connection or coherence (comp. the modern commentaries, especially those of Duhm and Baethgen; also Grätz, "Psalmen," Introduction). According to Grätz (l.c. p. 61), such combinations of two psalms in one was caused by the necessities of the liturgical services. It is not unlikely that some psalms were chanted responsively, part of the Levites singing one verse, and the others answering with the next. In the synagogues the Psalms were chanted antiphonally, the congregation often repeating after every verse chanted by the precentor the first verse of the psalm in question. "Halleluyah" was the word with which the congregation was invited to take part in this chanting. Hence it originally prefaced the Psalms, not, as in the Masoretic text, coming at the end. At the conclusion of the psalm the "maḳre" or precentor added a doxology ending with ("and say ye Amen"), whereupon the congregation replied "Amen, Amen" ("Monatsschrift," 1872, p. 481). The synagogal psalms, according to this, then, are cv., cvi., cvii., cxi., cxii., cxiii., cxiv., cxvi., and cxvii. (the shortest of all psalms), cxviii., cxxxv., cxxxvi., cxlvi.-cl.

Musical Accompaniment

Concerning the musical accompaniment less is known. Boys seem to have been added to the men's chorus ('Ar. 13b). Twelve adult Levites constituted the minimum membership of a chorus; nine of these played on the "kinnor," two on the "nebel," and one on the cymbals (ib. ii. 3-5). Singing seems to have been the principal feature of their art, the instruments being used by the singers for their self-accompaniment only. The kinnor, according to Josephus, had ten strings and was struck with a plectrum ("Ant." vii. 12, § 3), while the nebel had twelve notes and was played with the fingers. This information is not confirmed by what is known of the "lyra" or "kithara" of the Greeks. Jewish coins display lyres of three strings, and in a single instance one of five strings. Tosef., 'Ar. ii. gives the kinnor seven strings. According to Ps. xcii. 3, there must have been known a ten-stringed instrument. The Jerusalem Talmud agrees with Josephus in assigning the nebel to the class of stringed instruments (Yer. Suk. 55c; 'Ar. 13b). But it seems to have had a membranous attachment or diaphragm to heighten the effect of the strings (Yer. Suk. l.c.). The nebel and the "alamot" (I Chron. xv. 20;

Ps. xlviii.; Ps. ix., corrected reading) are identical (see Grätz, l.c. p. 71). The flute, "ḥalil," was played only on holy days ('Ar. ii. 3). The Hebrew term for choir-master was "menazzeah." See also Cymbals.

Fifty-seven psalms are designated as ; this is a word denoting "paragraph," hence a new beginning. Thirty psalms are designated as (= "song"), probably indicating that the psalm was actually sung in the Temple. Thirteen psalms are labeled, the meaning of which word is doubtful (see Hebrew dictionaries and the commentaries). Six psalms are superscribed -another puzzle-three times with the addition , once (lx.), and in lvi. with . Five psalms are called = "prayer" (xvii., xl., lxxxvi., cii., cxlii.). Two psalms are marked = "to remember" (xxxviii., lxx.), the meaning of which is not known. Ps. c. is designated by = "for thanksgiving," probably indicating its use in the liturgy as a hymn for the thank-offering. Ps. clv. is marked = "jubilee song or hymn," indicating its content. Ps. lx. has , probably a dittogram for = "for David." Ps. lxxxviii. has the heading , which seems to be also a dittogram of the preceding . Ps. vii. has another enigmatical caption (see commentaries).

Letter of St. Athanasius, Archbishop of Alexandria, to Marcellinus, concerning the Psalms

My dear Marcellinus,

Your steadfastness in Christ fills me with admiration. Not only are you bearing well your present trial, with its attendant suffering; you are even living under rule and, so the bearer of your letter tells me, using the leisure necessitated by your recent illness to study the whole body of the Holy Scriptures and especially the Psalms. Of every one of those, he says, you are trying to grasp the inner force and sense. Splendid! I myself am devoted to the Psalms, as indeed to the whole Bible; and I once talked with a certain studious old man, who had bestowed much labour on the Psalter, and discoursed to me about it with great persuasiveness and charm, expressing himself clearly too, and holding a copy of it in his hand the while he spoke. So I am going to write down for you the things he said.

Son, all the books of Scripture, both Old Testament and New, are inspired by God and useful for instruction, as it is written; but to those who really study it the Psalter yields especial treasure. Each book of the Bible has, of course, its own particular message: the Pentateuch, for example, tells of the beginning of the world, the doings of the patriarchs, the exodus of Israel from Egypt, the giving of the Law, and the ordering of the tabernacle and the priesthood; The Triteuch [Joshua, Judges, and Ruth] describes the division of the inheritance, the acts of the judges, and the ancestry of David; Kings and Chronicles record the doings of the kings, Esdras the deliverance from exile, the return of the people,

and the building of the temple and the city; the Prophets foretell the coming of the Saviour, put us in mind of the commandments, reprove transgressors, and for the Gentiles also have a special word. Each of these books, you see, is like a garden which grows one special kind of fruit; by contrast, the Psalter is a garden which, besides its special fruit, grows also some those of all the rest.

The creation, for instance, of which we read in Genesis, is spoken of in Psalm 18, The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament showest His handiwork, and again in 23, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof: the inhabited earth and all that dwell therein. He Himself laid the foundations of it on the seas." The exodus from Egypt, which Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy record, is fitly sung in Psalms 77, 105, 113. When Israel came out of Egypt, says this last, the House of Jacob from among a foreign people, Judah became his holy place and Israel came under his authority. He sent Moses His servant, Psalm 104 declares, Aaron whom He had chosen. He showed the words of His signs among them, and of His wonders in the land of ham. Darkness He sent, and it was dark, and they were not obedient to his word. He turned their waters into blood and slew their fish: their land brought forth frogs, even in the king's apartments. He spake, and dog-flies came, and flies in all their quarters; and so on, all through this Psalm and the next, we find the same things treated. As for the tabernacle and the priesthood, we have reference to them in Psalm 28, sung when the tabernacle was carried forth, Bring unto the Lord, ye sons of God, bring unto the Lord young rams, bring to the Lord glory and honour.

The doings of Joshua, the son of Nun, and of the Judges also are mentioned, this time in Psalm 104, They built them cities to dwell in and sowed fields and planted vineyards, for it was under Joshua that the promised land was given into their hands. And when we read repeatedly in this same Psalm, They cried unto the Lord in their trouble and He saved them out of their distress, the period of the judges is referred to, for then it was that, when they cried to Him, He raised up judges to deliver them from their oppressors, each time the need arose. In the same way, Psalm 19 has the kings in mind when singing, Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will gain glory by the Name of the Lord our God. They are brought down and fallen, but we are risen and stand upright. And Psalm 125 of the Gradual Psalms speaks of that which Esdras tells, When the Lord turned the captivity of Sion, we became as those comforted; and similarly Psalm 121, I was glad when they said unto me, We will go into the House of the Lord. Our feet were set in thy gates, O Jerusalem! Jerusalem is built as a city that has fellowship within itself: thither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to testify to Israel.

You see, then, that all the subjects mentioned in the historical books are mentioned also in one Psalm or another; but when we come to the matters of

which the Prophets speak we find that these occur in almost all. Of the coming of the Saviour and how, although He is God, He yet should dwell among us, Psalm 49 says, God shall come openly, even our God, and He shall not keep silence; and in Psalm 117 we read, Blessed is he that cometh in the Name of the Lord! We have blessed you from the House of the Lord. God is the Lord, and He has given us light. That He Who comes is Himself the Father's Word, Psalm 106 thus sings, He sent His Word and healed them, and rescued them out of all their distresses. For the God Who comes is this self-same Word Whom the Father sends, and of this Word Who is the Father's Voice, Whom well he knows to be the Son of God, the Psalmist sings again in 44, My heart is inditing of a good Word; and also in 109, Out of the womb, before the dawn, have I begotten Thee. Whom else, indeed, should any call God's very Offspring, save His own Word and Wisdom? And he, who knows full well that it was through the Word that God said, Let there be light, Let there be a firmament. Let there be all things, says again in Psalm 32, By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the Breath of His mouth.

And, so far from being ignorant of the coming of Messiah, he makes mention of it first and foremost in Psalm 44, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever, a scepter of justice is the sceptre of Thy kingdom. Thou has loved righteousness and hated lawlessness: wherefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. Further, lest any one should think this coming was in appearance only, Psalm 86 shows that He Who was to come should both come as man and at the same time be He by Whom all things were made. Mother Sion shall say, A man, a man indeed is born in her: and He himself, the Most Highest, founded her, it says; and that is equivalent to saying The Word was God, all things were made by Him, and the Word became flesh. Neither is the Psalmist silent about the fact that He should be born of a virgin - no, he underlines it straight away in 44, which we were quoting, but a moment since. Harken, O daughter, he says, and see and incline thine ear, and forget thine own people and thy father's house. For the King has desired thy beauty, and He is thy Lord. Is not this like what Gabriel said, Hail, thou that art full of grace, the Lord is with thee? For the Psalmist, having called Him the Anointed One, that is Messiah or Christ, forthwith declares His human birth by saying, Harken, O daughter, and see; the only difference being that Gabriel addresses Mary by an epithet, because he is of another race from her, while David fitly calls her his own daughter, because it was from him that she should spring.

Having thus shown that Christ should come in human form, the Psalter goes on to show that He can suffer in the flesh He has assumed. It is as foreseeing how the Jews would plot against Him that Psalm 2 sings, Why do the heathen rage and peoples meditate vain things? The kings of the earth stood up and their rulers took counsel together against the Lord and against His Christ. And Psalm

21, speaking in the Saviour's own person, describes the manner of His death. Thou has brought me into the dust of death, for many dogs have compassed me, the assembly of the wicked have laid siege to me. They peirced my hands and my feet, they numbered all my bones, they gazed and stared at me, they parted my garments among them and cast lots for my vesture. They pierced my hands and my feet- what else can that mean except the Cross? and Psalms 87 and 68, again speaking in the Lord's own person, tell us further that He suffered these things, not for His own sake but for ours. Thou has made Thy wrath to rest upon me, says the one; and the other adds, I paid them things I never took. For He did not die as being Himself liable to death: He suffered for us, and bore in Himself the wrath that was the penalty of our transgression, even as Isaiah says, Himself bore our weaknesses. So in Psalm 136 we say, The Lord will make requital for me; and in the 71st the Spirit says, He shall save the children of the poor and bring the slanderer low, for from the hand of the mighty He has set the poor man free, the needy man whom there was none to help.

Nor is this all. The Psalter further indicates beforehand the bodily Ascension of the Saviour into heaven, saying in Psalm 23, Lift up your gates, ye princes, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the king of glory shall come in! And again in 46, God is gone up with a merry noise, the Lord with the voice of the trumpet. The Session also it proclaims, saying in Psalm 109, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on My right hand, until I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet. And Psalm 9 mentions also the coming destruction of the devil, crying, Thou satest on Thy throne, Thou that judgest righteousness, Thou hast rebuked the heathen and the wicked one is destroyed. And that He should receive all judgement from the Father, this also the Psalter does not hide from us, but foreshows Him as coming to be the judge of all in 71, Give the King Thy judgements, O God, and Thy righteousness unto the King's Son, that He may judge Thy people in righteousness and Thy poor with justice. In Psalm 49 too we read, He shall call the heaven from above, and the earth, that He may judge His people. And the heavens shall declare His righteousness, that God is judge indeed. The 81st (82nd) like-wise says, God standeth in the assembly of gods, in the midst He judges gods. The calling of the Gentiles also is to be learnt from many passages in this same book, especially in these words of Psalm 46, O clap your hands together, all ye Gentiles, shout unto God with the voice of triumph; and again in the 71st, the Ethiopians shall fall down before Him, His enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarsis and of the islands shall bring presents, the kings of Arabia and Saba shall offer gifts. All these things are sung of in the Psalter; and they are shown forth separately in the other books as well.

My old friend made rather a point of this, that the things we find in the Psalms about the Saviour are stated in the other books of Scripture too; he stressed the

fact that one interpretation is common to them all, and that they have but one voice in the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, he went on, the opposite is true, to some extent; for, just as the Psalter includes the special subjects of all the other books, so also do they often contain something of the special feature of the Psalter. Moses, for example, writes a song; Isaiah does the same, and Habacuc offers prayer in form of song. And in the same way in every book we see something alike of prophecy, of law-giving, and of history; for the same Spirit is in all and He, being by nature One and Indivisible, is given whole to each: yet is He diverse in His manifestations to mankind, and each one who is taught by and receives Him ministers the word according to the moment's need. Thus, as I said before, Moses is at times a prophet and a psalmist, and the Prophets on occasion both lay down laws (like Wash you, make you clean. Wash clean your heart from wickedness, Jerusalem), and also record history, as when Daniel relates the story of Susanna or Isaias tells us about the Rab-shakeh and Sennacherib. Similarly the Psalter, whose special function is to utter songs, generalizes in song matters that are treated in detail in the other books, as I have shown you. It also even lays down laws at times, such as Leave off from wrath and let go displeasure, incline thine heart from evil and do good. Seek peace and ensue it, as well as telling us the history of Israel's journey and prophesying the coming of the Saviour, as I said just now.

You see, then, that the grace of the one Spirit is common to every writer and all the books of Scripture, and differs in its expression only as need requires and the Spirit wills. Obviously, therefore, the only thing that matters is for each writer to hold fast unyieldingly the grace he personally has received and so fulfil perfectly his individual mission. And, among all the books, the Psalter has certainly a very special grace, a choiceness of quality well worthy to be pondered; for, besides the characteristics which it shares with others, it has this peculiar marvel of its own, that within it are represented and portrayed in all their great variety the movements of the human soul. It is like a picture, in which you see yourself portrayed, and seeing, may understand and consequently form yourself upon the pattern given. Elsewhere in the Bible you read only that the Law commands this or that to be done, you listen to the Prophets to learn about the Saviour's coming, or you turn to the historical books to learn the doings of the kings and holy men; but in the Psalter, besides all these things, you learn about yourself. You find depicted in it all the movements of your soul, all its changes, its ups and downs, its failures and recoveries. Moreover, whatever your particular need or trouble, from this same book you can select a form of words to fit it, so that you do not merely hear and then pass on, but learn the way to remedy your ill. Prohibitions of evil-doing are plentiful in Scripture, but only the Psalter tells you how to obey these orders and abstain from sin. Repentance, for example, is enjoined

repeatedly; but to repent means to leave off sinning, and it is the Psalms that show you how to set about repenting and with what words your penitence may be expressed. Again, Saint Paul says, Tribulation worketh endurance, and endurance experience, and experience hope, and hope maketh not ashamed; but it is in the Psalms that we find written and described how afflictions should be borne, and what the afflicted ought to say, both at the time and when his troubles cease: the whole process of his testing is set forth in them and we are shown exactly with what words to voice our hope in God. Or take the commandment, In everything give thanks. The Psalms not only exhort us to be thankful, they also provide us with fitting words to say. We are told, too, by other writers that all who would live godly in Christ must suffer persecution; and here again the Psalms supply words with which both those who flee persecution and those who suffer under it may suitably address themselves to God, and it does the same for those who have been rescued from it. We are bidden elsewhere in the Bible also to bless the Lord and to acknowledge Him: here in the Psalms we are shown the way to do it, and with what sort of words His majesty may meetly be confessed. In fact, under all the circumstances of life, we shall find that these divine songs suit ourselves and meet our own souls' need at every turn.

And herein is yet another strange thing about the Psalms. In the other books of Scripture we read or hear the words of holy men as belonging only to those who spoke them, not at all as though they were our own; and in the same way the doings there narrated are to us material for wonder and examples to be followed, but not in any sense things we have done ourselves. With this book, however, though one does read the prophecies about the Saviour in that way, with reverence and with awe, in the case of all the other Psalms it is as though it were one's own words that one read; and anyone who hears them is moved at heart, as though they voiced for him his deepest thoughts. To make this clear and, like Saint Paul not fearing somewhat to repeat ourselves, let us take some examples. The patriarchs spoke many things, all fitting to themselves; Moses also spoke, and God answered; Elijah and Elisha, seated on Mount Carmel, called upon the Lord and said, The Lord liveth, before Whom I stand. And the other prophets, while speaking specially about the Saviour, addressed themselves also at times to Israel or to the heathen. Yet no one would ever speak the patriarchs' words as though they were his own, or dare to imitate the utterance of Moses or use the words of Abraham concerning the great Isaac, or about Ishmael and the home-born slave, as though they were his own, even though like necessity oppressed him. Neither, if any man suffer with those that suffer or be gripped with desire of some better thing, would he ever say as Moses said, Show me Thyself, or If Thou remittest their sin; then remit it; but if not, then blot me out of Thy book that Thou hast written. No more would any one use the prophets' words of praise or blame as though they were his own, or say, The Lord lives, in Whose sight I stand today. For he who reads those books is clearly reading not his own words

but those of holy men and other people about whom they write; but the marvel with the Psalter is that, barring those prophecies about the Saviour and some about the Gentiles, the reader takes all its words upon his lips as though they were his own, and each one sings the Psalms as though they had been written for his special benefit, and takes them and recites them, not as though someone else were speaking or another person's feelings being described, but as himself speaking of himself, offering the words to God as his own heart's utterance, just as though he himself had made them up. Not as the words of the patriarchs or of Moses and the other prophets will he reverence these: no, he is bold to take them as his own and written for his very self. Whether he has kept the Law or whether he has broken it, it is his own doings that the Psalms describe; every one is bound to find his very self in them and, be he faithful soul or be he sinner, each reads in them descriptions of himself.

It seems to me, moreover, that because the Psalms thus serve him who sings them as a mirror, wherein he sees himself and his own soul, he cannot help but render them in such a manner that their words go home with equal force to those who hear him sing, and stir them also to a like reaction. Sometimes it is repentance that is generated in this way, as by the conscience-stirring words of Psalm 50; another time, hearing how God helps those who hope and trust in Him, the listener too rejoices and begins to render thanks, as though that gracious help already were his own. Psalm 3, to take another instance, a man will sing, bearing his own afflictions in his mind; Psalms 10 and 11 he will use as the expression of his own faith and prayer; and singing the 53rd, 55th, 56th, and the 141st, it is not as though someone else were being persecuted but out of his own experience that he renders praise to God. And every other Psalm is spoken and composed by the Spirit in the selfsame way: just as in a mirror, the movements of our own souls are reflected in them and the words are indeed our very own, given us to serve both as a reminder of our changes of condition and as a pattern and model for the amendment of our lives.

This is the further kindness of the Saviour that, having become man for our sake, He not only offered His own body to death on our behalf, that He might redeem all from death, but also, desiring to display to us His own heavenly and perfect way of living, He expressed this in His very self. It was as knowing how easily the devil might deceive us, that He gave us, for our peace of mind, the pledge of His own victory that He had won on our behalf. But He did not stop there: He went still further, and His own self performed the things He had enjoined on us. Every man therefore may both hear Him speaking and at the same time see in His behaviour the pattern for his own, even as He himself has bidden, saying, Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart. Nowhere is more perfect teaching of virtue to be found than in the Lord's own life. Forbearance, love of men, goodness, courage, mercy, righteousness, all are found in Him; and in the

same way no virtue will be lacking to him who fully contemplates this human life of Christ. It was as knowing this that Saint Paul said, Be ye imitators of me, even as I myself am of Christ. The Greek legislators had indeed a great command of language; but the Lord, the true Lord of all, Who cares for all His works, did not only lay down precepts but also gave Himself as model of how they should be -carried out, for all who would to know and imitate. And therefore, before He came among us, He sketched the likeness of this perfect life for us in words, in this same book of Psalms; in order that, just as He revealed Himself in flesh to be the perfect, heavenly Man, so in the Psalms also men of good-will might see the pattern life portrayed, and find therein the healing and correction of their own.

Briefly, then, if indeed any more is needed to drive home the point, the whole divine Scripture is the teacher of virtue and true faith, but the Psalter gives a picture of the spiritual life. And, just as one who draws near to an earthly king observes the formalities in regard to dress and bearing and the correct forms of words lest, transgressing in these matters, he be deemed a boor, so he who seeks to live the good life and learn about the Saviour's conduct in the body is by the reading of this holy book first put in mind of his own soul's condition and then supplied with fit words for a suppliant's use. For it is a feature of this book that the Psalms which compose it are of many different sorts. Some such as 72, 77, and 113, are narrative in form; some are hortatory, like 31, 96, 102; some are prophetic, for example, 21, 44, 46, and 109; some, in whole or part, are prayers to God, as are 6, 15, 53, 101; some are confessions, notably the 50th, some denounce the wicked, like 13; while yet others, such as 8, 97, 116, 124, and many more, voice thanksgiving, praise, and jubilation, Psalm 65 alone of these having special reference to the Resurrection of the Lord.

It is possible for us, therefore, to find in the Psalter not only the reflection of our own soul's state, together with precept and example for all possible conditions, but also a fit form of words wherewith to please the Lord on each of life's occasions, words both of repentance and of thankfulness, so that we fall not into sin; for it is not for our actions only that we must give account before the judge, but also for our every idle word. Suppose, then, for example, that you want to declare anyone to be blessed; you find the way to do it in Psalm 1, and likewise in 31, 40, 111, 118, and 127. If you want to rebuke the conspiracy of the Jews against the Saviour, you have Psalm 2. If you are persecuted by your own family and opposed by many, say Psalm 3; and when you would give thanks to God at your affliction's end, sing 4 and 74 and 114-115. When you see the wicked wanting to ensnare you and you wish your prayer to reach God's ears, then wake up early and sing 5; and if you feel yourself beneath the cloud of His displeasure, you can say 6 and 37. If any plot against you, as did Ahithophel

against David, and someone tells you of it, sing Psalm 7, and put your trust in God Who will deliver you.

Contemplating humanity's redemption and the Saviour's universal grace, sing Psalm 8 to the Lord; and with this same Psalm or the 18th you may thank Him for the vintage. For victory over the enemy and the saving of created things, take not glory to yourself but, knowing that it is the Son of God Who has thus brought things to a happy issue, say to Him Psalm 9; and, if any wishes to alarm you, the 10th, still trusting in the Lord. When you see the boundless pride of many, and evil passing great, so that among men (so it seems) no holy thing remains, take refuge with the Lord and say Psalm 11. And if this state of things be long drawn out, be not faint-hearted, as though God had forgotten you, but call upon Him with Psalm 26. Should you hear others blaspheme the providence of God, do not join with them in their profanity but intercede with God, using the 13th and the 52nd. And if, by way of contrast, you want to learn what sort of person is citizen of heaven's kingdom, then sing Psalm 14.

When, again, you need to pray against your enemies and those who straiten you, Psalms 16, 85, 87, and 139 will all meet your need; and if you want to know how Moses prayed, you have the 89th. When you have been delivered from these enemies and oppressors, then sing Psalm 17; and when you marvel at the order of creation and God's good providence therein and at the holy precepts of the Law, 18 and 23 will voice your prayer; while 19 will give you words to comfort and to pray with others in distress. When you yourself are fed and guided by the Lord and, seeing it, rejoice, the 22nd awaits you. Do enemies surround you? Then lift up your heart to God and say Psalm 24, and you will surely see the sinners put to rout. If they persist, their murderous intent unslaked, then let man's judgement go and pray to God, the Only Righteous, that He alone will judge according unto right, using Psalms 25, 34, and 42. If your foes press yet harder and become a veritable host, that scorns you as not yet anointed, be not afraid, but sing again Psalm 26. Pay no attention either to the weakness of your own humanity or to the brazenness of their attack, but cry unceasingly on God, using Psalm 27. And when you want the right way of approach to God in thankfulness, with spiritual understanding sing Psalm 28. And finally, when you dedicate your home, that is your soul in which you receive the Lord and the house of your senses, in which corporeally your spirit dwells, give thanks and say the 29th and, from the Gradual Psalms, the 126th.

Again, when you find yourself hated and persecuted by all your friends and kinsfolk because of your faith in Christ, do not despair on this account nor be afraid of them, but go apart and, looking to the future, sing Psalm 30. And when you see people baptized and ransomed from this evil world, be filled with wonder at the love of God for men, and in thanksgiving for them sing the 31st. And whenever a number of you want to sing together, being all good and

upright men, then use the 32nd. When you have fallen among enemies but have escaped by wise refusal of their evil counsel, then also gather holy men together and sing with them the 33rd. And when you see how zealous are the lawless in their evil-doing, think not the evil is innate in them, as some false teachers say, but read Psalm 35 and you will see they are themselves the authors of their sin. And if you see these same wicked men trying, among other evils, to attack the weak and you wish to warn their victims to pay no heed to them, nor envy them, since they will soon be brought to nought, both to yourself and others say the 36th.

When, on the other hand, it is your own safety that is in question, by reason of the enemy's attacks, and you wish to bestir yourself against him, say the 38th; and if, when he attacks, you then endure afflictions, and wish to learn the value of endurance, sing Psalm 39. When you see people in poverty, obliged to beg their bread, and you want to show them pity, you can applaud those who have already helped them and incite others to like works of mercy by using 40. Then again, if you are aflame with longing for God, be not disturbed at the reviling of your enemies but, knowing the immortal fruit that such desire shall bear, comfort your soul and ease your pains with hope in God, and say the 41st. When you wish to recall in detail the loving-kindnesses which God showed to the fathers, both in their exodus from Egypt and in the wilderness, and to reflect how good God is and how ungrateful are men, you have the 43rd, the 77th, the 88th, the 104th, the 105th, the 106th and also the 113th. And the 45th will supply your need when after deliverance from afflictions you flee to God, and want to give Him thanks and tell of all His loving mercy shown towards yourself.

But suppose now that you have sinned and, having been put to confusion, are repenting and begging for forgiveness, then you have the words of confession and repentance in Psalm 50. Or you have been slandered, perhaps, before an evil king, and you see the slanderer boasting of his deed: then go away and say Psalm 51. And when they persecute and slander you, as did the Ziphites and the strangers to King David, be not disturbed but with full confidence in God sing praise to Him, using Psalms 53 and 55. If still the persecution follows hard on you, and he who seeks your life enters (though he knows it not) the very cave in which you hide, still you must not fear; for even in such extremity as this you have encouragement in Psalm 56 and also in the 141st. The plotter, it may be, gives orders that a watch be kept over your house, and yet you manage to escape; give thanks to God, then, and let Psalm 58 be written on your heart, as on a pillar, as a memorial of your deliverance. And if not only your enemies cast you in the teeth but those also whom you thought to be your friends reproach and slander you and hurt you sorely for a time, you can still call upon God for help, using Psalm 54. Against hypocrites and those who glory in appearances,

say for their reproach the 57th. But against those whose enmity is such that they would even take away your life, you must simply oppose your own obedience to the Lord, having no fear at all but all the more submitting to His will as they grow fiercer in their rage, and your form of words for this will be the 61st Psalm. Should persecution drive you to the desert, fear not as though you were alone in it, for God is with you, and there at daybreak you may sing to Him the 62nd. And if even there the fear of foes and their unceasing plots pursues you, be they never so many or so insistent in their search for you, still you must not yield; for the toy arrows of a child will be enough to wound them, while Psalms 63, 64, 69, and 70 are on your lips.

The 64th Psalm will meet your need, whenever you desire to sing praise to God: and if you want to teach any one about the Resurrection, sing the 65th. When asking mercy from the Lord, praise Him with the 66th. When you see wicked men enjoying prosperity and peace and good men in sore trouble, be not offended or disturbed at it but say Psalm 72. When God is angry with His people, you have wise words of comfort in Psalm 73. When you have occasion to testify concerning God, 9, 70, 74, 91, 104 to 107, 110, 125, 135, and 137 all fit the case; and Psalm 75, when used intelligently, provides you with an answer for the heathen and the heretics, showing that the knowledge of God is not with them at all, but only in the Church. And when the enemy takes possession of your place of refuge, even though sorely harassed and afflicted, do not despair but pray: and when your crying has been heard, give thanks to God, using Psalm 76. And if they have profaned the house of God and slain the saints, throwing their bodies to the birds of prey, do not be crushed or frightened at such cruelty, but, suffering with those that suffer it, plead you for them with God, using Psalm 78.

Psalms 80 and 94 are suitable if you want to sing on a festival, together with other servants of the Lord; and when the enemy once more muster round you, threatening God's House and joining forces against His holy ones, do not you be frightened of either their numbers or their strength, for you have a very anchor of hope available in Psalm 82. If, moreover, you behold the House of God and His eternal dwelling, and have a longing for them, as the Apostle had, then say the 83rd; and when at length their anger is abated and you are free again, voice your thanksgiving in the 84th and in the 114th and 115th. To see the difference between the Church and schism and to confound schismatics, you can say 86. To encourage yourself and others in the fear of God and to show how fearless is the soul that hopes in Him, say 90.

Do you want to give thanks on the Lord's Day? Then say the 23rd; if on a Monday, then the 94th; and if on a Friday, your words of praise are in the 92nd, for it was when the Crucifixion was accomplished that the House of God was

built, for all the enemy attempted to prevent it, so it is fitting we should sing on Friday a song of victory, such as that Psalm is. Psalm 95 is apt, if God's House has been captured and destroyed and then re-built; and when the land has rest from war and peace returns, sing that The Lord is King in 96. You want to sing on Wednesday? The Psalm then is 93; for it was on the fourth day from the Sabbath that the Lord through His betrayal entered on His Passion, by which He should redeem us and by the which He triumphed gloriously. So when you read in the Gospel how on the Wednesday the jews took counsel against the Lord, seeing Him thus boldly challenging the devil on our behalf, sing the words of this Psalm 93. And again, when you see the providence and power of God in all things and want to instruct others in His faith and obedience, get them first to say the 99th Psalm. And when you have yourself experienced His power in judgement (for always His justice is tempered by His mercy) the next Psalm will express your need.

If through the weakness of your nature and the strain of life you find yourself at times downcast and poor, sing for your consolation Psalm 101 and use the two that follow it to lift your heart in thankful praise to God, as in and through all circumstances we should always do. Psalms 104, 106, 112, 116, 134, and 145 to 150 not only show the reasons why God should be praised, but tell you how to do it. Have you faith, as the Lord bade, and believe in the prayers you utter? Then say the 115th Psalm. You feel that, like the Apostle, you can now press forward, forgetting all the things that lie behind? Then you have the fifteen Gradual Psalms for every step of your advance.

Another time, perhaps, you find you have been led astray by others' arguments—well, then, the moment you perceive it, stop your sinning, sit down and weep, as they did of old by Babylon's waters, using the words of Psalm 136. Since it is precisely by being tempted that one's worth is proved, Psalm 138 will meet your need when you thank God for testing safely past. And if the enemy once more gets hold of you and you desire to be free, then say 139. For prayer and supplication, sing Psalms 5, 140 to 142, and 145. Has some Goliath risen up against the people and yourself? Fear not, but trust in God, as David did, and sing his words in Psalm 143. Then, marvelling at God's kindnesses to everyone and mindful of His goodness to yourself and all, praise Him, again in David's words, with Psalm 104. You want to sing to Him? Use 95 and 97. If, weak as you are, you yet are chosen for some position of authority among the brethren, you must not be puffed up as though you were superior to them, but rather glorify the Lord Who chose you and sing Psalm 150, which is especially the Psalm of David. And for Psalms in praise of God, having some of them the title Alleluia, you have all these, 104-106, 110-117, 134, 135, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, and 150.

If, again, you want to sing Psalms that speak especially about the Saviour, you will find something in almost all of them; but 44 and 109 to relate particularly to His Divine Begetting from the Father and His coming in the flesh, while 21 and 68 foretell the Holy Cross, the grievous plots He bore and how great things He suffered for our sakes. The 3rd and 108th also display the snares and malice of the Jews and how Iscariot betrayed Him; 20, 49, and 71 all set Him forth as judge and foretell His Second Coming in the flesh to us; they also show the Gentiles' call. The 15th shows His resurrection from the dead, in flesh, the 23rd and 46th His ascension into heaven. And in the four Psalms 92, 95, 97, and 98, all the benefits deriving to us from the Saviour's Passion are set forth together.

Such, then, is the character of the Book of Psalms, and such the uses to which it may be put, some of its number serving for the correction of individual souls, and many of them, as I said just now, foretelling the coming in human form of our Saviour Jesus Christ. But we must not omit to explain the reason why words of this kind should be not merely said, but rendered with melody and song; for there are actually some simple folk among us who, though they believe the words to be inspired, yet think the reason for singing them is just to make them more pleasing to the ear! This is by no means so; Holy Scripture is not designed to tickle the aesthetic palate, and it is rather for the soul's own profit that the Psalms are sung. This is so chiefly for two reasons. In the first place, it is fitting that the sacred writings should praise God in poetry as well as prose, because the freer, less restricted form of verse, in which the Psalms, together with the Canticles and Odes, [the hymns of Exodus 15: 1-18, Deuteronomy 32:1-43, and Habacuc 3] are cast, ensures that by them men should express their love to God with all the strength and power they possess. And, secondly, the reason lies in the unifying effect which chanting the Psalms has upon the singer. For to sing the Psalms demands such concentration of a man's whole being on them that, in doing it, his usual disharmony of mind and corresponding bodily confusion is resolved, just as the notes of several flutes are brought by harmony to one effect; and he is thus no longer to be found thinking good and doing evil, as Pilate did when, though saying I find no crime in Him, he yet allowed the Jews to have their way; nor desiring evil though unable to achieve it, as did the elders in their sin against Susanna - or, for that matter, as does any man who abstains from one sin and yet desires another every bit as bad. And it is in order that the melody may thus express our inner spiritual harmony, just as the words voice our thoughts, that the Lord Himself has ordained that the Psalms be sung and recited to a chant.

Moreover, to do this beautifully is the heart's desire and joy, as it is written, Is any among you happy? Let him sing! And if there is in the words anything harsh, irregular or rough, the tune will smoothe it out, as in our own souls also sadness is lightened as we chant, Why then art thou so heavy, O my soul, why

dost thou trouble me? and failure is acknowledged as one sings, My feet were almost gone, and fear is braced by hope in singing, The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man can do to me.

Well, then, they who do not read the Scriptures in this way, that is to say, who do not chant the divine Songs intelligently but simply please themselves, most surely are to blame, for praise is not befitting in a sinner's mouth. But those who do sing as I have indicated, so that the melody of the words springs naturally from the rhythm of the soul and her own union with the Spirit, they sing with the tongue and with the understanding also, and greatly benefit not themselves alone but also those who want to listen to them. So was it with the blessed David when he played to Saul: he pleased God and, at the same time, he drove from Saul his madness and his anger and gave back peace to his distracted spirit. In like manner, the priests by their singing contributed towards the calming of the people's spirits and helped to unite them with those who lead the heavenly choir. When, therefore, the Psalms are chanted, it is not from any mere desire for sweet music but as the outward expression of the inward harmony obtaining in the soul, because such harmonious recitation is in itself the index of a peaceful and well-ordered heart. To praise God tunefully upon an instrument, such as well-tuned cymbals, cithara, or ten-stringed psaltery, is, as we know, an outward token that the members of the body and the thoughts of the heart are, like the instruments themselves, in proper order and control, all of them together living and moving by the Spirit's cry and breath. And similarly, as it is written that By the Spirit a man lives and mortifies his bodily actions, so he who sings well puts his soul in tune, correcting by degrees its faulty rhythm so that at last, being truly natural and integrated, it has fear of nothing, but in peaceful freedom from all vain imaginings may apply itself with greater longing to the good things to come. For a soul rightly ordered by chanting the sacred words forgets its own afflictions and contemplates with joy the things of Christ alone.

So then, my son, let whoever reads this Book of Psalms take the things in it quite simply as God-inspired; and let each select from it, as from the fruits of a garden, those things of which he sees himself in need. For I think that in the words of this book all human life is covered, with all its states and thoughts, and that nothing further can be found in man. For no matter what you seek, whether it be repentance and confession, or help in trouble and temptation or under persecution, whether you have been set free from plots and snares or, on the contrary, are sad for any reason, or whether, seeing yourself progressing and your enemy cast down, you want to praise and thank and bless the Lord, each of these things the Divine Psalms show you how to do, and in every case the words you want are written down for you, and you can say them as your own.

There is, however, one word of warning needed. No one must allow himself to

be persuaded, by any arguments what-ever, to decorate the Psalms with extraneous matter or make alterations in their order or change the words themselves. They must be sung and chanted in entire simplicity, just as they are written, so that the holy men who gave them to us, recognizing their own words, may pray with us, yes and even more that the Spirit, Who spoke by the saints, recognizing the selfsame words that He inspired, may join us in them too. For as the saints' lives are lovelier than any others, so too their words are better than ever ours can be, and of much more avail, provided only they be uttered from a righteous heart. For with these words they themselves pleased God, and in uttering them, as the Apostle says, they subdued kingdoms, they wrought righteousness, they obtained promises, they stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens, women received their dead by resurrection.

Let each one, therefore, who recites the Psalms have a sure hope that through them God will speedily give ear to those who are in need. For if a man be in trouble when he says them, great comfort will he find in them; if he be tempted or persecuted, he will find himself abler to stand the test and will experience the protection of the Lord, Who always defends those who say these words. By them too a man will overthrow the devil and put the fiends to flight. If he have sinned, when he uses them he will repent; if he have not sinned, he will find himself rejoicing that he is stretching out towards the things that are before and, so wrestling, in the power of the Psalms he will prevail. Never will such a man be shaken from the truth, but those who try to trick and lead him into error he will refute; and it is no human teacher who promises us this, but the Divine Scripture itself. For God commanded Moses to write the great song and to teach the people, and him whom He had appointed leader He bade also to write Deuteronomy, to have it ever in his hand and to meditate unceasingly upon its words; because these are sufficient in themselves both to call men's minds to virtue and to bring help to any who ponder them sincerely. It is a certain fact that when Joshua, the son of Nun, entered the land of promise and saw the ordered ranks of the heathen and the Amorite kings all drawn up against him, in face of all these swords and weapons he read Deuteronomy in the ears of all and reminded them of the words of the Law, and then, having thus armed the people, he overcame the foe. King Josiah also, when the book was found, and had been read through to all, no longer feared his enemies. And at any time when war was threatening Israel, the Ark in which the tables of the Law were kept was carried out before the host, and was sufficient help against any array, except when there was among those who bore it or, elsewhere among the people, any prevailing hypocrisy or sin; for faith and an honest state of mind are always necessary if the Law is to be an effectual ally in the fulfilment of man's vows.

And I have heard, said the old man, from wise men, that in old days in Israel they put demons to flight by reading of the Scriptures only, and in the same way uncovered plots made by them against men.

For this reason he rebuked as being worthy of the utmost condemnation people who neglect the Scriptures, while making use of impressive words from other sources for the purposes of exorcism so-called. Those who did that were playing with the sacred words, he said, and offering themselves as to daemons, as did those Jews, the sort they tried in that way to exorcise the man at Ephesus. On the other hand, daemons fear the words of holy men and cannot bear them; for the Lord Himself is in the words of Scripture and Him they cannot bear, as they showed when they cried out to Christ, I pray you, torment me not before the time. In the same way Paul commanded the unclean spirits, and demons were subject to the disciples. The hand of the Lord was on Elisha the prophet also, and he prophesied about the waters to three kings, when the minstrel played and sang according to His bidding. So also is it with us today: if any one have at heart the interests of those who suffer, let him use these words, and he will both help the sufferer, let him use these words, and he will both help the sufferers more and at the same time prove his own faith to be true and strong; thus God, perceiving it, will grant the suppliants perfect health. Well knew the holy Psalmist that, when he said in Psalm 118, I will meditate in Thy judgements: and I will not forget Thy words; and again, Thy statutes were my songs in the place of my sojourning. For with these words they all worked out their own salvation, saying, If Thy law were not my meditation, then had I perished in my humiliation. Paul also strengthened his disciple with like words, saying, Ponder these things, abide in them, that thy progress may be manifest.

And so you too, Marcellinus, pondering the Psalms and reading them intelligently, with the Spirit as your guide, will be able to grasp the meaning of each one, even as you desire. And you will strive also to imitate the lives of those God-bearing saints who spoke them at the first.



Charles H. Spurgeon's Preface to the Psalms

At last, ending with Charles H. Spurgeon's Preface to the Psalms²

My Preface shall at least possess the virtue of brevity, as I find it difficult to impart to it any other.

The delightful study of the Psalms has yielded me boundless profit and ever-growing pleasure; common gratitude constrains me to communicate to others a portion of the benefit, with the prayer that it may induce them to search further for themselves. That I have nothing better of my own to offer upon this peerless book is to me matter of deepest regret; that I have anything whatever to present is subject for devout gratitude to the Lord of grace. I have done my best, but, conscious of many defects, I heartily wish I could have done far better.

The Exposition here given is my own. I consulted a few authors before penning it, to aid me in interpretation and arouse my thoughts; but, still I can claim originality for my comments, at least so I honestly think. Whether they are better or worse for that, I know not; at least I know I have sought heavenly guidance while writing them, and therefore I look for a blessing on the printing of them.

The collection of quotations was an after-thought. In fact, matter grew upon me which I thought too good to throw away. It seemed to me that it might prove

² Public Domain.

serviceable to others, if I reserved portions of my reading upon the various Psalms; those reserves soon acquired considerable bulk, so much so that even in this volume only specimens are given and not the bulk.

One thing the reader will please clearly to understand, and I beg him to bear it in mind; "*I am far from endorsing all I have quoted*". I am neither responsible for the scholarship or orthodoxy of the writers. The names are given that each author may bear his own burden; and a variety of writers have been quoted that the thoughts of many minds might be before the reader. Still I trust nothing evil has been admitted; if it be so it is an oversight.

The research expended on this volume would have occupied far too much of my time, had not my friend and amanuensis Mr. John L. Keys, most diligently aided me in investigations at the British Museum, Dr. William's Library, and other treasuries of theological lore. With his help I have ransacked books by the hundred, often without finding a memorable line as a reward, but at other times with the most satisfactory result. Readers little know how great labour the finding of but one pertinent extract may involve; labour certainly I have not spared: my earnest prayer is that some measure of good may come of it to my brethren in the ministry and to the church at large.

The Hints to the Village Preacher are very simple, and an apology is due to my ministerial readers for inserting them, but I humbly hope they may render assistance to those for whom alone they are designed, viz., lay preachers whose time is much occupied, and whose attainments are slender.

Should this first volume meet with the approbation of the judicious, I shall hope by God's grace to continue the work as rapidly as I can consistently with the research demanded and my incessant pastoral duties. Another volume will follow in all probability in twelve months' time, if life be spared and strength be given.

It may be added, that although the comments were the work of my health, the rest of the volume is the product of my sickness. When protracted illness and weakness laid me aside from daily preaching, I resorted to my pen as an available means of doing good. I would have preached had I been able, but as my Master denied me the privilege of thus serving him, I gladly availed myself of the other method of bearing testimony for his name. O that he may give me fruit in this field also, and his shall be all the praise.

C. H. Spurgeon

Clapham, December, 1869.



The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7)

One biblical phrase that has troubled many people is the command to fear God. What does fear of the Lord mean, and why does God ask us to fear Him?

We fear many bad things: Crime, the growing Islamic State warriors, auto accidents, devastating storms, West Nile virus, chemical weapons, mass murderers, terrorists, earthquakes, ebola, demons and Satan himself! But our loving Heavenly Father? Why would God tell us to fear Him?

Wrong fear

First, realize that there is a fear of God that doesn't produce good results. This terrifying and paralyzing fear is likely the type of fear that comes to mind for many.

The Bible shows several examples of fear gone wrong. Consider these passages:

“You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!” (James 2:19).

The unprofitable servant was corrected for being wicked and lazy after he made the excuse, “I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground” instead of

using it productively (Matthew 25:25).

Revelation 21:8 even tells us the “cowardly” or “fearful” (King James Version) will not be in God’s Kingdom.

Such fear does not have a positive end. Obviously this fear is not what God is looking for. So what type of fear *does* God want us to have?

Meaning of the fear of the Lord

The main Hebrew and Greek words translated fear in the Bible can have several shades of meaning, but in the context of the fear of the Lord, they convey a positive reverence.

The Hebrew verb *yare* can mean “to fear, to respect, to reverence” and the Hebrew noun *yirah* “usually refers to the fear of God and is viewed as a positive quality. This fear acknowledges God’s good intentions (Ex. 20:20). ... This fear is produced by God’s Word (Ps. 119:38; Prov. 2:5) and makes a person receptive to wisdom and knowledge (Prov. 1:7; 9:10)”

The Greek noun *phobos* can mean “reverential fear” of God, “not a mere ‘fear’ of His power and righteous retribution, but a wholesome dread of displeasing Him” (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, “Fear, Fearful, Fearfulness”). This is the type of positive, productive fear Luke describes in the early New Testament Church:

“Then the churches throughout all Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and were edified. And walking in the *fear of the Lord* and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, they were multiplied” (Acts 9:31, emphasis added).

One resource includes this helpful summary: “The fear of God is an attitude of respect, a response of reverence and wonder. It is the only appropriate response to our Creator and Redeemer” (*Nelson’s NKJV Study Bible*, 1997, note on Psalm 128:1).

Purpose of fear

If you study the Bible, there is no mistaking the repeated commands to fear God. Wise King Solomon put it this way in explaining his reason for writing the book of Proverbs: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7).

Why? Consider these words of the psalmist: “The fear of the LORD is the

beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever” (Psalm 111:10).

In Psalm 34 King David also tells us about learning the fear of the Lord:

“Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. ... Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (verses 11, 13-14).

A healthy fear of God includes the fear of the consequences of disobedience. There may be times of temptation or trial when we may forget some of the better reasons for obeying God, and that is when we had better think of the consequences (Exodus 20:20).

This is what Hebrews 10:26-31 tells us: “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

“Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The LORD will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Reverence of God helps us to take Him and His beneficial laws seriously. Being in harmony with the spiritual laws that govern the universe has astounding benefits. Many of these come in this life, but the greatest benefits will be experienced in the life to come (1 Timothy 4:8; Psalm 16:11).

Family rules

Consider this biblical analogy: Children learn their family rules partly through fear of correction (Hebrews 12:9-11). Of course, when they grow older, they should continue to follow the rules out of love.

God, whose family rules are even more important, also trains us to obey for our own good.

As incredible as it sounds, God wants us to actually be His children!

But we live in a world that is deceived and ruled by Satan. So we must come

out of Satan's ways—we must not be children of Satan (John 8:44). Instead we should learn the way of God's family—the way of love. God is love (1 John 4:8), and His laws can be summarized as love for God and love for fellow man (Matthew 22:37-40).

Forgiveness and the fear of the Lord

Sadly, however, everyone sins and earns the death penalty. If everyone is just going to die forever, what would be the purpose of fear? Sure, we might be depressed and terrified, but is that what God really wants?

Consider this fascinating passage: “If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared” (Psalm 130:3-4).

God's offer of forgiveness to those who repent gives us a reason to fear—a reason to change. It also gives us a reason to be eternally grateful and to grow in love to be more like our loving God!

How does love cast out fear?

The reverential fear of the Lord is designed to help us grow to become more like God—to grow in love. And this growth removes any need to be terrified of God's judgment. As the apostle John put it:

“Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” (1 John 4:17-18).

A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature by Arndt and Gingrich gives an excellent explanation of the use of *phobos* in verse 18. In the specific context of the verse, the meaning is “slavish fear ... which is not to characterize the Christian's relation to God.”

The same shade of meaning is applied to the word *fear* in Romans 8:15, “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’” Though we are to voluntarily yield ourselves as bond servants or slaves to God, He is not an abusive, cruel slave driver who terrorizes and torments us, which is the point of this verse.

Some misunderstand and think that love casts out not only fear but law. However, John explains that God's laws actually define God's love:

“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). This connection between God's love and His 10 Commandments is also made clear in Paul's writings and the Gospels (Romans 13:9-10; Matthew 22:37-40).

God wants His laws written on our hearts. For example, even if we had no fear of being caught, we should choose to never steal from others—because we love them and God.

We must never lose our respect and appreciation for God, but we should grow beyond being motivated solely by fear and rather be motivated by God's love—having a deep love and respect for God and His words.

A different Greek word for fear is found in 2 Timothy 1:7: “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” The Greek *deilia* means “cowardice, timidity, fearfulness” (Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study New Testament*). *Deilia* is consistently used in a negative manner, unlike *phobos*. Revelation 21:8, referred to earlier, uses *deilos*, the adjective form of this word

Eternal benefits of the fear of the Lord

So, rather than a paralyzing terror, the positive fear of the Lord taught in the Bible is a key element in change. It helps us have a proper, humble perspective of ourselves in relation to our awesome God; it helps us in times of temptation when we need to remember the serious consequences of disobeying God; and it motivates us to become more like our loving Creator.

By doing these things, the fear of the Lord helps bring eternal benefits:

“Do not let your heart envy sinners, but be zealous for the fear of the LORD all the day; for surely there is a hereafter, and your hope will not be cut off” (Proverbs 23:17-18).

“The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to turn one away from the snares of death” (Proverbs 14:27).

“The fear of the LORD leads to life, and he who has it will abide in satisfaction; he will not be visited with evil” (Proverbs 19:23).



Weaver at his loom

The Book of Proverbs

Following the book of Psalms, of which David was the principal author, come the three books usually ascribed to his son Solomon. Of these proverbs is the first.

The Book of Proverbs is a collection of moral and philosophical maxims of a wide range of subjects presented in a poetic form. This book sets forth the "philosophy of practical life. It is the sign to us that the Bible does not despise common sense and discretion. It impresses upon us in the most forcible manner the value of intelligence and prudence and of a good education. The whole strength of the Hebrew language and of the sacred authority of the book is thrown upon these homely truths. It deals, too, in that refined, discriminating, careful view of the finer shades of human character so often overlooked by theologians, but so necessary to any true estimate of human life" (Stanley's Jewish Church). As to the origin of this book, "it is probable that Solomon gathered and recast many proverbs which sprang from human experience in preceeding ages and were floating past him on the tide of time, and that he also elaborated many new ones from the material of his own experience. Towards the close of the book, indeed, are preserved some of Solomon's own sayings that seem to have fallen from his lips in later life and been gathered by other hands' (Arnot's Laws from Heaven, etc.) This book is usually divided into three parts: (1.) Consisting of ch. 1-9, which contain an exhibition of wisdom as the highest

good. (2.) Consisting of ch. 10-24. (3.) Containing proverbs of Solomon "which the men of Hezekiah, the king of Judah, collected" (ch. 25-29). These are followed by two supplements, (1) "The words of Agur" (ch. 30); and (2) "The words of king Lemuel" (ch. 31). Solomon is said to have written three thousand proverbs, and those contained in this book may be a selection from these (1 Kings 4:32). In the New Testament there are thirty-five direct quotations from this book or allusions to it.

Survey

Author: King Solomon is the principal writer of Proverbs. Solomon's name appears in 1:1, 10:1, and 25:1. We may also presume Solomon collected and edited proverbs other than his own, for Ecclesiastes 12:9 says, "Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs." Indeed, the Hebrew title *Mishle Shelomoh* is translated "Proverbs of Solomon."

Date of Writing: Solomon's proverbs were penned around 900 B.C. During his reign as king, the nation of Israel reached its pinnacle spiritually, politically, culturally, and economically. As Israel's reputation soared, so did King Solomon's. Foreign dignitaries from the far reaches of the known world traveled great distances to hear the wise monarch speak (1 Kings 4:34).

Purpose of Writing: Knowledge is nothing more than an accumulation of raw facts, but wisdom is the ability to see people, events, and situations as God sees them. In the Book of Proverbs, Solomon reveals the mind of God in matters high and lofty and in common, ordinary, everyday situations, too. It appears that no topic escaped King Solomon's attention. Matters pertaining to personal conduct, sexual relations, business, wealth, charity, ambition, discipline, debt, child-rearing, character, alcohol, politics, revenge, and godliness are among the many topics covered in this rich collection of wise sayings.

Key Verses: Proverbs 1:5, "Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance."

Proverbs 1:7, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline."

Proverbs 4:5, "Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them."

Proverbs 8:13-14, "To fear the LORD is to hate evil; I hate pride and arrogance, evil behaviour and perverse speech. Counsel and sound judgment are mine; I have understanding and power."

Brief Summary: Summarizing the Book of Proverbs is a bit difficult, for unlike many other books of Scripture, there is no particular plot or storyline found in its pages; likewise, there are no principal characters in the book. It is wisdom that takes center stage—a grand, divine wisdom that transcends the whole of history, peoples, and cultures. Even a perfunctory reading of this magnificent treasury reveals the pithy sayings of the wise King Solomon are as relevant today as they were some three thousand years ago.

Foreshadowing's: The theme of wisdom and its necessity in our lives finds its fulfilment in Christ. We are continually exhorted in Proverbs to seek wisdom, get wisdom, and understand wisdom. Proverbs also tells us—and repeats it—that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (1:7; 9:10). Our fear of the Lord's wrath and justice is what drives us to Christ, who is the embodiment of God's wisdom as expressed in His glorious plan of redemption for mankind. In Christ, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3), we find the answer to our search for wisdom, the remedy for our fear of God, and the "righteousness, holiness and redemption" that we so desperately need (1 Corinthians 1:30). The wisdom that is found only in Christ is in contrast to the foolishness of the world which encourages us to be wise in our own eyes. But Proverbs also tells us that the world's way is not God's way (Proverbs 3:7) and leads only to death (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25).

Practical Application: There is an undeniable practicality found in this book, for sound and sensible answers to all manner of complex difficulties are found within its thirty-one chapters. Certainly, Proverbs is the greatest "how-to" book ever written, and those who have the good sense to take Solomon's lessons to heart will quickly discover godliness, prosperity, and contentment are theirs for the asking.

The recurring promise of the Book of Proverbs is that those who choose wisdom and follow God will be blessed in numerous ways: with long life (9:11); prosperity (2:20-22); joy (3:13-18); and the goodness of God (12:21). Those who reject Him, on the other hand, suffer shame and death (3:35; 10:21). To reject God is to choose folly over wisdom and is to separate ourselves from God, His Word, His wisdom and His blessings.

Outline

- I. Introduction (1:1-9) II.
- II. Sin and Righteousness Personified and Contrasted (1:10-9:18)
- III. Single-Verse Contrasts of Sin and Righteousness (10:1-22:16)
- IV. Miscellaneous and Longer Contrasts (22:17-29:27)
- V. Righteousness in Poems of Climax (30:1-33:31)

The first section of the book begins (Prov.1.7) and ends (Prov.9.10) with the statement that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” and “wisdom.” Thus the wisdom extolled in Proverbs is not just a high degree of intelligence but a moral virtue. This is made plain in the first section by the contrasts involved. Wisdom is personified as a righteous woman (Prov.8.1). This is natural because wisdom is a feminine noun in Hebrew. The foolish woman is depicted as using words similar to those of wisdom, to invite men into her house (Prov.9.4, Prov.9.16), but she invites them to sin. The harlot, who is given prominence in this section, represents all sin. Murder and theft are the opposite of wisdom in Prov.1.1-Prov.1.33, but usually the harlot, also called the strange woman, the simple woman, or the foolish woman, is held up as the opposite of personified righteousness. Some find Christ personified in the wisdom cited in Prov.8.22, but this is not certain. This word is not so used in the NT.

In the major section, Prov.10.1-Prov.22.16, the same contrast appears in single-verse aphorisms. Here the personification of sin and righteousness does not appear, but the same synonyms for virtue and vice are repeatedly used and should be understood as such. Perhaps the greatest error in interpreting the book comes from the tendency to quote these Proverbs as mere secular maxims instead of godly instruction. “Folly” here does not mean stupidity, just as “the woman of folly” (Prov.9.13) does not refer to an ignoramus. Both terms refer to sin. Through this whole section the terms wisdom, understanding, integrity, and knowledge are synonymous terms referring to holiness. Their opposites, fool, folly, simple, mocker, quarrelsome, etc., refer to wickedness. In short, a “foolish son” is not a dullard, but a scoundrel. A “mocker” is not just supercilious, but is a rebel against wisdom. The lack of context sometimes clouds the interpretation. But occasionally a verse is partially repeated elsewhere, where the variant form clarifies the meaning (cf. Prov.27.15 with Prov.21.19).

Section IV, Prov.22.19-Prov.29.27, is more general but uses the same vocabulary of morality. In this part are some special parallels with an Egyptian work entitled *The Wisdom of Amen-em-Opet*. The correspondence, however, does not invalidate the above claim that the author of Proverbs gives distinctive treatment to his theme.

The last section, Prov.30.1-Prov.31.31, includes several climactic proverbs that apparently emphasize the fourth point (cf. Prov.6.16-Prov.6.19, where among seven things the seventh is the climax). Here also is the famous final poem—an alphabetical poem—extolling the wife of noble character. Particular attention is called to the personification of wisdom in the eighth chapter of the book, where the spiritually-minded reader will have little difficulty in identifying the voice of the Lord.

Quick Overview for your study

Purpose of Writing

Maxims (or aphorisms) played an important part in antiquity. This is still the case in the Orient. In a time when not everybody was able to read or to write, the learning or knowledge of proverbs was a special form of instruction.

One has found a certain similarity between Proverbs 22:17-23:11 and the Egyptian book of knowledge of Amenemope. This discovery on the one hand confirms the spreading and popularity of collected proverbs in the Orient. At the same time an enormous difference comes to light: The worldly, heathen maxim is a mixture of moral philosophy and thinking by chance whereas the book of Proverbs of Solomon in the Holy Scriptures considers the fear of Jehovah as aim, which is the beginning of wisdom.

The book of Proverbs shows what the god-fearing man in this world shall seek and what he shall avoid. The book also teaches that man irrespective of his spiritual blessings under the government of God will reap what he has sowed. It contains the advice of divine wisdom for daily life of a god-fearing man in all his difficulties, trials, dangers and joys of his way over this earth.

The Proverbs (written by Solomon, the king of peace) also bear certain parallels to the principles of the kingdom of God as the Lord Jesus has set them forth in the so-called Sermon of the Mount in Matthew 5-7. The divine wisdom, which is so often mentioned in Proverbs, and which in chap. 8 and 9 even speaks to the reader in personified manner even finds its perfect expression in the NT in the Person of Christ, the Son of God (1 Cor. 1:30).

Peculiarities

a) The Fear of the Lord

The *fear of the Lord* is the key word of this book. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge (chap. 1:7) and of wisdom (chap. 9:10; 15:33). The fear of the Lord is to hate evil (chap. 8:13; 16:6) and it is a fountain of life (chap. 14:27; 19:23). Besides compare the following references: Proverbs 1:29; 2:5; 3:7; 10:27; 14:2+26; 15:16; 22:4; 23:17; 24:21; 31:30.

b) The Name of God

The name of *God* only appears five times in Proverbs whereas the name of *Jehovah* (Jahwe) appears around 85 times. Jehovah is the name, which expresses

God's relation to His creatures, that is men, and especially to His people Israel (compare with Overview on Genesis, 3. Peculiarities).

c) Poetical Form

The book of Proverbs is written in poetical form also (compare explanations to the Psalms). Chapter 31:10-31 however is written in acrostic form that is the first letter of each verse is identical with the sequence of the Hebrew alphabet.

Overview of Contents for reading and study

I. Proverbs 1-9: Introduction

1. Chapter 1:1-7 Title and Purpose of Book

2. Chapter 1:8 -
Chapter 9:18 Praise of Wisdom

Chapter 1:8 -33 Warning against Sinners and Wisdom's Cry

Chapter 2 The Path of Wisdom

Chapter 3 The Teachings of Wisdom

Chapter 4 The Striving for Wisdom

Chapter 5 Walking in Purity

Chapter 6 Warning against Divers Sins

Chapter 7 Warning against Prostitution

Chapter 8 Wisdom Personified

Chapter 9 Wisdom and Folly

II. Proverbs 10:1 -22:16: Proverbs of Solomon: Conduct in the Fear of God and in Wisdom

Chapter 10 - 17	Contrary between Conduct of the Just and Conduct of the Fool
Chapter 18 - 19	Relationship towards the Neighbour
Chapter 20:1-22:16	Personal Conduct

III. Proverbs 22:17 - 24:34: Various Proverbs of the Wise

Chapter 22:17-29	Introduction and Personal Warnings
Chapter 23	Personal Warnings
Chapter 24	Wisdom and Folly

IV. Proverbs 25 - 29: Proverbs of Solomon collected during Reign of Hezekiah

Chapter 25	Commendation for Fear of God and Wisdom
Chapter 26	Warning against Folly, Laziness and Malice
Chapter 27	Wise Conduct towards Others
Chapter 28 - 29	Characteristics of the Lawless and of the Righteous

V. Proverbs 30 - 31: The Words of Agur and Lemuel

Chapter 30	Agur's Repentance and Teachings
Chapter 31	Lemuel's Instructions; the Woman of Worth

Prophecy in the Book of Proverbs

With the exception of Proverbs 30-31, the proverbs were spoken by Solomon about 1,000 B.C. Proverbs 1-24 were perhaps written by him in a book. Proverbs 25-29 were Solomon's proverbs added to the first part of the book by Hezekiah about 730 B.C. The last 2 chapters were added at an unknown time. The book shows the practical moral and spiritual truth in proverbial form for people of God (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

Prophecies:	O.T. Scripture	NT Fulfillment
The Messiah would be from everlasting to everlasting.	<u>Proverbs 8:22-23</u>	<u>John 17:5</u>
The Messiah would ascend and descend to and from heaven.	<u>Proverbs 30:4a</u>	<u>John 3:13</u> <u>John 6:38</u> <u>Mark 16:19</u>
God would have a "begotten" Son.	<u>Proverbs 30:4b</u>	<u>Matthew 3:16-17</u>



*‘Give careful attention to your herds for riches to not endure for ever’
(Proverbs 27:23-24)*

The Book of Ecclesiastes

A good understanding of the Book of Ecclesiastes is essential to comprehending the individual passages. One cannot seek understanding of a verse in Ecclesiastes without understanding why Solomon wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes we will see when going along.

PURPOSE AND OUTLINE

Bring those enamoured with the world back to God.

- 1) Create doubt and suspicion a person who lives without God the Creator
- 2) Persuade men to live for His Creator God

Ecclesiastes is what is called a pre-evangelistic tract. Its purpose is not to explain how to be reconciled with God but to persuade them to think how God needs to be the center of their lives.

Ecclesiastes encourages us to contemplate the meaning of our lives in light of the presence of God the Creator. This is a very applicative message for our generation. Our world is bent on squeezing out the sacred so that it can live for the world's vanity. Solomon demonstrates his theme with his own life and shares insight as to how secularism proves to be ultimately false and unfulfilling.

When man lives apart from God, it is more than a religious statement. He is forcing the meaning of life to be centered around his own perspective. While he is living, man manages to avoid all of life's inconsistencies. But when facing death, his reference point suddenly disappears (11:8).

The meaning in life goes from tragic to horror. The conclusion is to make God your prime reference point for living. Live for God. Make your decisions in light of what He considers to be right and wrong. This is the only way to find real meaning in life.

- A. Life without God is Meaningless (Ecclesiastes 1:1- 2:26)
- The Emptiness Of the Secular Life (Ecclesiastes 1:1-11)
- The Search For Meaning of Life (Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:11)
- The Unhappy Discovery Of His Search (Ecclesiastes 2:12-26)
- First Objective Summary Analysis (Ecclesiastes 2:24-26)

The young person might easily conclude that meaning in life comes through fun or work, but as one gets older, these conclusions are not so evident and in fact

downright untrue. If the world really existed without a God, then we should be able to find contentment in pleasure, projects and exploration themselves. It does not, however. Meaning in life instead comes from living our lives in His presence. For example, just by remembering the Lord's kindness toward us by enabling us to enjoy the simple activities of eating and drinking.

B. Life without God is Unfair (Ecclesiastes 3:1-5:20)

Indiscretion of Time (Ecclesiastes 3:1-22)

Balance of Life (Ecclesiastes 4:1- 5:17)

A Summary (Ecclesiastes 5:18-20)

Second Objective Summary Analysis (Ecclesiastes 5:18-20)

Life can seem very unfair, but we need to realize it is not the possession of riches or the accomplishment of great things which make a great life, but the enjoyment of what God has given to you. It is not the number of years but how much a person can objectively see God's good hand in his life

C. Life without God is Unfulfilling (Ecclesiastes 4:1-9:18)

Missing Out on a Good Life (Ecclesiastes 6:1-12)

Lacking the Discernment Needed (Ecclesiastes 7:1-29)

Coping with a World of Futility (Ecclesiastes 8:1-9:18)

Third Objective Summary Analysis (Ecclesiastes 9:7-9)

The mature person might conclude that meaning in life comes through a good fair life. They could be comfortable with what they see around them—the good being properly rewarded and the evil man being punished. Instead however, the more we look around, the more we are satisfied with what we see on earth. Our whole concern for fairness and justice reflects the presence of a moral God.

D. Life with God Only Makes Sense (Ecclesiastes 9:1-12:14)

Insight: The wise life is the best life (Ecclesiastes 9:1-10:19)

Counsel: Live wisely (Ecclesiastes 11:1-12:14)

Fourth Objective Summary Analysis (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

Despair popped up everywhere in life. Nothing seemed to work right, at least when man lived and observed life apart from the Lord. Even after his life of searching, Solomon could not figure out everything. He encouraged us to do the most wise thing—seek the Lord from where wisdom, justice and life itself came.

King Solomon, the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes, called himself the Preacher, literally the speaker to the assembly. “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (Ecclesiastes 1:1). It seems rather apparent by

the multitude of his confessions that King Solomon, the son of King David, wrote Ecclesiastes after many backslidden years.

Earlier on in his life, during the dedication of the temple, we can see a real earnestness of Solomon's soul. His perceptive prayer of 2 Chronicles 6 and 7 perhaps is the longest and most oft-quoted prayer recorded in the Bible. This was probably the time, early in his life, when he wrote the Song of Songs. At some time, however, he looked back on his life and saw his departure from the Source of life.

He looked like he had a wonderfully fulfilling life, but when he looked back at it, he realized that the deeds, pleasure and accomplishments did not mean anything without a close relationship with the Creator. An outward form of religion never provides a substitute to a close relationship with the Almighty God. The world stood up and recognized Solomon's great achievement, but he unashamedly admits that having all and not having God is absolute meaningless.

Down deep in Solomon's heart, there was a seed of corruptness that was not kept under self-control. It grew out of control and distorted his life perspective. Only later in life, did he finally observe the difference between life and living. Life could not find its meaning in the many projects that he had involved himself in. They only became distractions to the real meaning in life, only found in God. God was near his heart but not his first love. He loved other things more than the Lord. His life before this writing clearly showed this.

Only later in his life did he slow down to catch a view of what he had done. Perhaps he was alluding to the wrestling of his heart in his words, "He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Ecclesiastes could well be called 'Solomon's Confessions.' The Book of Ecclesiastes is a sign that he had not only genuinely seen his departure from the Lord but had returned to the Lord of Life.

All through the Book of Ecclesiastes we have found King Solomon's oft-repeated phrase, "under the sun." He used it 27 times, primarily in the first half of the book. The same pattern is found with the word 'vanity' used 16 times (see chart). Solomon looks back upon his backslidden life and sees that when man pursues things 'under the sun' or apart from God, things are not well.

Not a few people have told me that they feel depressed when reading this book. Some don't even want to read the book because of it! This was Solomon's purpose. Whenever a person lives his life apart from the clear influence of God's grace, he will end up with a sad and unfulfilled life. Something is desperately

missing. Unfortunately, man doesn't observe this right away but often only after most of his life has passed.

Think of the Book of Ecclesiastes as a big canvas. Scene after scene is carefully painted. In between each scene are many more pithy statements that serve as a backdrop to the whole. When one looks at the whole picture, one's eyes are drawn to large despairing scenes painted at the beginning of the book. Having seen it, it creates a curiosity as to why he so personally writes about his despair. The reader begins to look for something that the author might have discovered.

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Solomon wants to pass on to us his hard-earned discernment, not to make money or a reputation, but to warn and rescue. He is trying to help those caught in the web of secularism's to escape the plague of a meaningless life and find true fulfillment and joy in the presence of God. Since a fulfilling life cannot be found 'under the sun,' then we ought to live 'under the heaven'—the world influenced by God, that is, the kingdom of God.

The secular society is best described as mankind without God. The modern world boasts that its choice is much greater than the old life of morals and God. They run with a frenzy after new approaches to life and understanding so that they can escape God's influence in life. Secular man boasts in his choices but hides the consequences: depression, broken relationships, hatred, disease, drugs, loneliness, and anxiety.

Without God, man's resources are limited to what he has and what he makes out of life. When things go well, he is prideful and content, but when anything threatens his throne, he becomes very insecure and anxious. Because man is missing life's most essential part, his individual pursuits in life are vain. One cannot be pacified by temporal toys because God has set eternity in his heart.

More condensed outline for Bible reading and prayer

I. Introduction 1:1-11

A. Prologue 1:1-2

B. Nothing New 1:3-11

II. Experiments 1:12-2:26

A. Wisdom 1:12-18

B. Expansion of the Search for Meaning 2:1-16

C. Conclusion of the Experiments 2:17-26

III. A Time for Everything 3:1-12:8

A. Times and Seasons 3:1-6:6

1. Introduction 3:1-9

2. The Burden on Men 3:10-12

3. Oppression 4:1-3

4. Labour 4:4-6

5. Alone 4:7-12

6. Parable 4:13-16

7. Sacrifice of Fools 5:1-7

8. Wealth 5:8-6:6

a. Corruption 5:8-12

b. Wealth and Its Owner 5:13-15

c. Eat, Drink, and Be Merry 5:16-20

d. Inability to Enjoy Wealth 6:1-6

B. Summary 6:7-12

C. Times and Seasons, Part 2 7:1-12:8

1. Sorrow vs. Laughter 7:1-7

2. The End is Better 7:8-10

3. Wisdom is Good, But... 7:11-14

4. Morality is Useless 7:15-22

5. Wisdom is Unattainable 7:23-8:1

6. The Proper Time 8:2-8

7. Inability to Understand 8:9-17

8. Common Destiny for All 9:1-12

9. Wisdom is Better Than Folly 9:13-10:1

10. God's Work is Beyond Understanding 10:2-11:6

11. A Rising Crescendo of Despair 11:7-12:8

IV. Conclusion 12:9-14

The ground for ascribing Ecclesiastes to Solomon is fourfold: The indirect claim of the book itself, (1: 1,12) ; (2) the general opinion of Jews and Christians from the earliest times; (3) the fitness of Solomon to write it ; (4) the Jack of agreement among critics as to any other author or period.

The design of the book seems to be to show the insufficiency of all earthly objects to confer happiness, and thus prepare man to receive the true happiness in Christ when presented to him. It is not affirmed that this was the design present in the mind of the human writer, but that it was the design of the Holy Spirit who inspired the writing.

There are many different plans or theories of the book. In the first place, there are those who conceive of it as a formal treatise on the vanity of human affairs. There are others who think it merely a collection of disconnected thoughts and maxims. A third class speak of it as a kind of sustained dialogue between a teacher and his pupils, as suggested in the introduction to the book of Proverbs in our last lesson. A fourth regard it as a biography of Solomon's own life, and a fifth, as an ideal book of the experience of the natural as distinguished from the spiritual man. This last does not necessarily exclude any of the others, but rather explains, perhaps, why any one of them may be taken as the correct view.

They who hold to the first idea of a formal treatise recognize four distinct discourses, e. g., chapters 1, 2; 3-5; 6: 1-8: 15; 8: 16-12: 7. They who hold to the fourth idea think that the book not only records, but re-acts the secrets of Solomon's own search for happiness, making of it a kind of dramatic biography. In other words, Solomon becomes himself again in the writings of the book, the various phases of his former self, having fits of study, luxury, misanthropy, etc., all ending in disappointment. In this case it is important to note that the word "wisdom" as used in Ecclesiastes means "science," while as used in Proverbs it means "piety."

The Book of the Natural Man

By "the book of the natural man" is meant man as he is "under the sun," compared with the man spoken of by Paul whose "citizenship is in heaven." The first proof presented is that the only divine name used in the book is

the "natural" name, God (Elohim), the significance of which all will recognize from our reference to it in the study of Genesis. Jehovah, the name associated with the covenant of redemption, is not once employed in the book of Ecclesiastes ; hence man is seeking what is best "under the sun," but not seeking Him who is above the sun.

A second proof is the frequent use of that phrase just referred to, "under the sun." As Dr. Erdman says, "Man is looking up but not knowing what is beyond, except judgment." A third proof is this, viz.: that all the experiences and observations of the book are bound together by the one question : "What is the chief good ?" "Is life worth living ?" While the answer is sought amidst general failure, contradictions, and half-truths, because man is out of Christ, and yet face to face with the mysteries of God and nature.

A fourth proof is what the book itself styles "the conclusion of the whole matter" (12 : 13, 14), which, the more you think about it, the more you perceive to be that of the natural man only. "To fear God and keep His commandments," is right, but the author of Ecclesiastes confessedly has not done so, and yet he sees judgment in the distance and has not preparation to meet it. "Where man ends therefore, God begins." The book of the natural man concludes where that of the spiritual man begins. The all-in-all of man under the sun, the first Adam, convicts him of failure and guilt in order to lead him to the all-in-all of the man above the sun, the second Adam, who bare our guilt in His own body on the tree

. This conception of the book easily explains why some of its conclusions are only partially true and others altogether false, such as 2: 16; 3:19; 9:2, etc. And if it be asked, How then can the book be inspired? The answer is that in contending for the inspiration of the Bible we do not claim the inspiration of the men, but the writings ; while in the latter case it is not meant that every word thus written is true, and in that sense God's Word, but that the record of it is true. That is, God caused it to be written that this or that man feit this or that way, and said thus and so, and hence the record of how he feit and what he said is God's record, and in that sense true and inspired.

Commentary on Book Ecclesiastes

Theological Note

In a study of this Ebook one must carefully distinguish between what is revealed truth and what is merely the inspired record of man's unaided reasonings. Erroneous teachings, such as annihilation, 3:16-22, and soul sleep, 9:5 and 10, cannot be said to be taught by God's Word when they are recorded by inspiration as merely natural man's reasonings.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

1:1-3. The theme of the book

1: 4-3:22. The theme of the emptiness of life proved

1:4-11. By the transitoriness of things

1:12-18. By the futility of human endeavour

2: 1-26. By the emptiness of pleasure, wealth and work

3:1-22. By the certainty of death

The "words" are meaningful sayings designed to impart vital instruction. They are the sayings of *Qohéleth* (transliterated "Koheleth"³), a designation variously rendered "Preacher," "Speaker," "Spokesman," "Convener," "Assembler," and "Teacher." In the role of an "assembler," he could be understood to be a person who assembled hearers in order to address them or an individual who assembled or made collections of proverbs or wise sayings. (1:1)

Koheleth referred to himself as the "son of David." Although "son" can apply to any male descendant of King David, the term is restricted by the words, "king in Jerusalem." The Septuagint reads, "king of Israel in Jerusalem," and, in verse 12, both the Hebrew text and the Septuagint refer to him as "king over Israel in Jerusalem." Solomon alone fits that description, as no descendant of David thereafter ruled over all Israel. Upon Solomon's death and the start of

³ **Ecclesiastes** ([/i.kliːziːˈæstiːz/](#); Greek: Ἐκκλησιαστής, *Ekklesiastes*, Hebrew: קהלת, *Qohéleth*, *Koheleth*) is one of 24 books of the Tanakh or Hebrew Bible, where it is classified as one of the *Ketuvim* (or "Writings"). It is among the canonical Wisdom Books in the Old Testament of most denominations of Christianity. The title *Ecclesiastes* is a Latin transliteration of the Greek translation of the Hebrew **Koheleth** (meaning "Gatherer", but traditionally translated as "Teacher" or "Preacher"), the eponymous author of the book.

Rehoboam's reign, ten tribes revolted and established an independent monarchy. (1:1)

Some have reasoned that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes after repenting from his apostasy, but there is no supporting biblical statement to this effect. Moreover, although first-century Jewish historian Josephus included details about Solomon's reign not found in the scriptural record, he makes no mention of any repentance. This suggests that no ancient tradition existed about Solomon's repenting from apostasy. If he had indeed done so, this apparent silence about a favorable outcome would be difficult to explain.

"Vanity of vanities" is the common rendering for the Hebrew expression *havél havalím*. This denotes a vanity above all other vanities, that is, the greatest vanity, the utmost vanity, a vanity of the superlative degree. Other English terms that convey the thought of the Hebrew *hével* would be "emptiness," "nothingness," "meaninglessness," "transitoriness," "purposelessness," and "futility." These meanings harmonize with the basic sense of the Hebrew — "vapour," "breath," "exhalation." The utter emptiness is further stressed by repetition. The Hebrew text reads, "'Vanity of vanities,' says Koheleth, 'vanity of vanities, the whole — vanity.'" The Hebrew term *kol*, meaning "whole," "all," or "everything," is not to be understood in the absolute sense. It simply denotes everything in human affairs that became the object of Koheleth's careful evaluation, based on his personal experience and keen observation. (1:2)

"None" — that is the implied answer to Koheleth's question about what "profit" (Hebrew, *yithróhn*, also defined as "advantage," "gain," "that which is over and above, or in excess") does a man have from all his "labor," or "toil." This is so because nothing has any permanence. (1:3)

The Hebrew word for man is *'adhám*, from a root meaning "red." This root is also the one for *'adhamáh*, "ground," "soil," or "land." Accordingly, *'adhám* seemingly designates an "earthling," one formed from the reddish soil. (1:3; Genesis 2:7)

The Hebrew word for "labor" (*'amál*) denotes painful, wearisome, burdensome, or exhausting toil. A literal reading for the phrase starting with "his labor" would be, "his labour which he labors." The repetitious combination "labor which he labours" adds emphasis to the hard, wearisome, or exhausting nature of the toil and the toiling. It also suggests monotony — a relentless cycle of labouring. (1:3)

"Under the sun" signifies "on earth," the place beneath the sun from the standpoint of the human observer. It is here on earth that man toils to the point of weariness. (1:3)

The transitoriness of human endeavours is also evident from Koheleth's next words. One generation of humankind is replaced by another generation, as one generation after another passes off the earthly scene. The earth, however, remains. With reference to the continuance of the earth, *'ohlám* is the term appearing in the Hebrew text. This word is commonly rendered "forever," but it specifically designates time that has no set limit. The Septuagint reads, "into the age," which expression is likewise translated "forever." (1:4)

A strict literalism should not be forced upon the statement about the rising and setting of the sun. Koheleth is simply calling attention to repetitive cycles as they appear to the earthly observer. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west, seemingly hurrying back to its place, thereafter to repeat the familiar cycle. "Hurries," "hastens," and "speeds" are renderings for the Hebrew term *shaáph*, defined as "gasp," "pant," "pant after." The sun is figuratively depicted as a runner, eagerly panting after its place. The "place" may figuratively refer to the sun's abode during the night when it is not seen. According to the reading of the Septuagint, the sun "draws to its place." (1:5)

Although translators commonly use the word "wind" at the beginning of verse 6, the Hebrew term is found in the second part of this verse. The Hebrew literally reads, "going to south and circling to north." Both the Septuagint and the Syriac link this phrase to the sun, not to the wind. In the Septuagint, verses 5 and 6 read, "And the sun rises, and the sun goes down and draws to its place; rising there, it goes toward the south and circles toward the north." If the reference is to the sun and not to the wind, the meaning could be that, from the standpoint of the human observer, there is a seeming movement from south to north, this seeming movement taking place between the summer and winter solstices. (1:6)

The basic objection to viewing the sun as the subject is that the sun really does not "go round," "turn," or "circle" to the north. Thereafter, in this verse, the "circling" or "turning" definitely refers to the wind. So there is justification for understanding all of verse 6 to refer to the wind. The primary thought of Koheleth's words is that the wind blows in one direction and then in another, ever moving in repetitive cycles. (1:6; see the Notes section for examples of translations that render the entire verse as applying to the wind.)

Similarly, streams continue to empty into the sea, but the sea is never filled. The water cycle continues. Ancient Jewish sources attributed this to underground tunnels through which water flowed from the sea back into the rivers. There is, however, no reason to believe that wise Koheleth had this erroneous view. The Hebrew word rendered "streams" or "rivers" is *nechalím* (singular, *nachál*). This term often designates torrents that flowed during the rainy season but completely disappeared in the dry summer. (Compare Job 6:15.) So it would have been apparent to Koheleth that the source of such streams was

precipitation. He would also have been able to observe that the rain-bearing clouds moved in from the direction of the sea (the Mediterranean). (Compare 1 Kings 18:44, 45.) As Koheleth expressed it, the torrents continually return to their source, to the sea from which they came. (1:7)

With reference to the repetitive cycles, Koheleth said, “All the things — wearisome; a man cannot speak.” The numberless repetitive cycles to be seen in human affairs and in the natural world give no evidence of coming to an end, to a state of rest. From the human perspective, anything that is repetitious, giving no promise of any letup or rest, is fatiguing, tiring, exhausting, or wearying. Accordingly, one would be at a loss for words when attempting to convey accurately the concept of countless repetitive cycles continuing for endless ages to come. (1:8; see the Notes section for an application to “words,” not “all the things.”)

Although numberless visual impressions continually enter it, the eye is never satisfied, filled up, with the object of seeing having come to a pleasant culmination. Likewise, a barrage of various sounds, including human speech, enters the ear. The ear, however, is not filled, not having reached the state of being fully satisfied with the sum of all that has been heard. Because so much of what is seen and heard proves to be repetitious, humans experience a sense of restlessness, dissatisfaction. There is a desire for seeing and hearing something truly different — new. (1:8)

Koheleth observed that, in the realm of nature and in the affairs of humankind, everything takes place according to the same cyclical patterns. In the world of nature, whatever happened in the past is what will occur again. Similarly, whatever people have done in former times will be repeated. Nothing is really new “under the sun” (in the earthly realm where humans conduct their affairs of life). Everything continues to take place according to God’s promise, “As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, will never cease.” (Genesis 8:22, NIV) Babies are born, grow up, get married, have children of their own, grow old, and finally die. The basic routine of life does not vary. It is a cycle of working, eating, and sleeping. There have been times of prosperity and poverty, abundance and famine, advancement and regression, stability and instability, freedom and oppression, and peace and war. Earth’s inhabitants have had the same hopes, longings, goals, desires, frustrations, and disappointments. (1:9)

The sweeping statement that “there is nothing new under the sun” could cause someone to conclude that there must be at least one exception. Possibly anticipating this, Koheleth raised the question whether there is anything concerning which it can be said that it is new. His answer is that it has existed from long ago (*’ohlám*, in this case being descriptive of the indefinite past; “ages

that came to be from before us” [LXX]), from a time preceding him and his contemporaries. (1:10)

Koheleth seems to refer to the harsh reality that people who lived in the past have been forgotten and that this will also prove to be true regarding future generations. Those of future generations simply will not be remembered by those following them in time. The passage of many centuries has confirmed Koheleth’s words. Billions of the human race have been forgotten. Even those whose names have been preserved in ancient writings and who exerted great power over others have no real influence on the billions of earth’s present inhabitants. (1:11)

The words of Koheleth may be translated, “There is no remembrance of the former ones.” Because the Hebrew word *ri’shóhn* simply denotes the “former,” a number of translations convey the meaning to be “former things,” thus linking the term with the doings and occurrences spoken of in the preceding verses. “The earlier ones are not remembered; so too those that will occur later will no more be remembered than those that will occur at the very end.” (Tanakh). “No one thinks anymore about what happened earlier, and also the deeds of our descendants their children will sometime not remember anymore.” (*Niemand denkt mehr an das, was früher geschehen ist, und auch an die Taten unserer Nachkommen werden sich deren Kinder einmal nicht mehr erinnern.* [German, *Hoffnung für alle*]) “We have just forgotten what has formerly occurred. And in a few years one will not remember anymore what we are doing now.” (*Wir haben nur vergessen, was damals geschehen ist. Und in einigen Jahren wird man sich nicht mehr an das erinnern, was wir jetzt tun.* [German, *Neues Leben*]) The Septuagint may likewise be understood to designate things: “There is no remembrance of the first [ones, things].” As in the case of people, past doings and occurrences are, of course, soon forgotten. (1:11)

Koheleth (as in verse 1) identified himself in the role of a monarch, saying, “I, Koheleth, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.” The Hebrew verb for “to be” in this case expresses a completed action and, therefore, is commonly rendered “was.” This has been cited as indicating that Solomon could not have been the intended monarch because he continued to be king up to the day of his death. The Hebrew verb, however, does not have to be regarded in such a restrictive way. Koheleth may simply have spoken of himself as being king at the time, without implying that he later ceased to be such. The Septuagint reads, “I, Ecclesiast, became [*egenómen*] king over Israel in Jerusalem.” (1:12)

The expression “king over Israel” preceded the division of the nation into two kingdoms. Saul of the tribe of Benjamin, was the first one to be anointed as “king over Israel” (1 Samuel 15:1, 17, 35; 16:1), and he was commonly referred to as the “king of Israel.” (1 Samuel 24:14; 26:20) Even the neighboring

Philistines spoke of Saul as “king of Israel.” (1 Samuel 29:3) Saul’s son Jonathan expressed the conviction that David would be “king over Israel.” (1 Sam. 23:17) Later, Solomon’s father David was anointed as king over the house of Judah. (2 Samuel 2:4) Not until after the death of Saul’s son Ish-bosheth (who had become king over Israel) was David anointed as “king over Israel.” (2 Samuel 2:8-10; 5:3) So the expression “king over Israel in Jerusalem” corroborates the link to Solomon, for he is the only “son of David” who ruled over all Israel from the city of Jerusalem. (1:12)

Koheleth next said, “I gave my heart.” The term “heart” translates the Hebrew *lev* and is often rendered “mind.” (NAB, NASB, NRSV, REB, Tanakh) *Lev*, however, could apply to the self or inner self. “I devoted myself” (NIV, NLT); “I have applied myself.” (NJB) Koheleth’s words may indicate that he “gave” or “set” his “heart,” (1) his all, his entire being, or (2) his whole mind, his complete attention, to seeking or searching out everything that is done under the heavens. (1:13)

The Hebrew word rendered “seek” (*darásh*) may also signify “study,” and this is the term used in a number of translations (NIV, REB, Tanakh). In the Septuagint, *darásh* is rendered “search out” (*ekzetéo*), and this meaning fits the context well. Koheleth expressed the next action by using the Hebrew *tur*, defined as “spy out,” “investigate,” “examine,” and “explore,” corresponding to the meaning of the Greek *katasképtomai* appearing in the Septuagint. The thought may be that Koheleth did his seeking or searching out and then carefully examined or investigated his findings. This seeking or searching and the examining was done with wisdom, being guided by wisdom or sound judgment. (1:13)

“All” or “everything” under “the heavens” (on earth beneath the skies) is to be regarded in a relative sense. It includes only what became the object of Koheleth’s searching and careful examination. The term “all” is limited to what Koheleth calls ‘*inyan ra*’ (literally, “occupation of evil”) and variously translated “vexatious employment” (Rotherham), “unhappy business” (RSV, Tanakh), “grievous task” (NASB), “worthless task” (REB), “wearisome task” (NJB), “thankless task” (NAB), and “tragic existence” (NLT). The “occupation of evil” with which “earthlings” are “occupied” (‘*anáh*’) evidently denotes the painful toiling in which they must engage just to live, to exist. In other contexts, the Hebrew word ‘*anáh*’ can mean to be “afflicted,” “humbled,” or “oppressed.” The Septuagint rendering is *perispáo*, meaning “preoccupy” or “distract.” (1:13)

God has allowed the painful “business,” “occupation,” or “employment” to be the lot of sinful humans and, therefore, it is referred to as his giving the occupation to them. This “occupation” is “evil” or “calamitous” because nothing of lasting value or permanence is produced. The futility of all the toiling is

summed up in God's words to Adam, "By the sweat of your brow shall you get bread to eat, until you return to the ground — for from it you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you will return" (1:13; Gen. 3:19; Tanakh)

Koheleth had "seen" or personally observed "all the works" done by humans "under the sun" (on the earth beneath the sun). Based on his careful observations of human laboring, he was moved to conclude, All is "vanity," "emptiness," "meaninglessness," or "nothingness." It is a "striving" or "chasing" after "wind," after something that has no real substance. (1:14; see the Notes section.)

Through his careful investigation of human affairs, Koheleth came to the painful realization that the incessant striving, struggling, and toiling of humankind brought no real satisfaction. Nothing had any permanence and humans were powerless in effecting lasting change for the better. He then set forth the basic reason for this in the form of a proverb, "A twisted thing that cannot be made straight, a lack that cannot be made good." (1:15, Tanakh)

On account of human sinfulness, much indeed is defective or flawed. It is twisted or crooked. Yet, nothing can be done to straighten out the many defects that are clearly manifest in every part of human society. Even the best minds cannot come up with solutions that will result in permanent good. The sincerest efforts prove to be to no avail in straightening out what is twisted. So the twisted or crooked thing remains such. (1:15)

The Hebrew term (*chesróhn*) that has been translated "lack" signifies "deficit," "lacking thing," or "what is missing." As to what cannot be done respecting the lack, the Hebrew term appearing in the text is *manáh*, meaning "numbered" or "counted." This could mean that, if something is lacking or missing, it is not there to be counted. Another possible meaning is that the inability to number or to count signifies that the lack cannot be "made complete" or cannot be "made good." Yet another sense is that the defects cannot be counted because there are just too many of them. The basic point is the same — much simply cannot be rectified. (1:15)

According to the literal reading of the Hebrew text, Koheleth said, "I spoke — I — to my heart." In this case, "heart" (*lev*) may designate the self or inner self. This would denote that Koheleth spoke to himself or thought within himself. He then expressed the subject of his inner reflection. The Hebrew text reads, "I became great and increased wisdom above all who were before me in Jerusalem, and my heart saw much wisdom and knowledge." (1:16)

"Became great" is a rendering of the Hebrew *gadhál*. Many translators link this verb to wisdom. "I have amassed great wisdom, surpassing all my predecessors." (REB) "I have acquired a greater stock of wisdom than anyone

before me in Jerusalem.” (NJB) “I have magnified and increased wisdom.” (NASB) It is, however, possible to understand the words of Koheleth as expressing two distinct thoughts — (1) he became great in his royal position, exercising extensive dominion and possessing abundant riches, and (2) he increased in wisdom. “I have become great, and have gathered wisdom.” (Rotherham) “Here I have grown richer and wiser.” (Tanakh) These renderings also harmonize with the description at 1 Kings 10:23, 24 (REB), “King Solomon outdid all the kings of the earth in wealth and wisdom, and the whole world courted him to hear the wisdom with which God had endowed his mind.” (1:16; see also 1 Kings 4:20–34; 10:1–22.)

The Hebrew preposition *‘al* preceding “Jerusalem” often means “over.” Translators have commonly inserted words that limit the meaning to rulers over Jerusalem (“anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem” [NIV]; “all my predecessors on the throne at Jerusalem” [REB]; “any that ruled before me over Jerusalem” [Tanakh]). *‘Al*, however, can also mean “in,” and this meaning has the support of the Septuagint. Accordingly, the reference does not have to be restricted to rulers but can include any exceptionally wise former resident of Jerusalem. The city itself had existed for centuries prior to Solomon’s reign, its history extending at least back to the time of Abraham when priest-king Melchizedek reigned there. (1:16; Genesis 14:18 [Salem is the earlier name for Jerusalem.])

During all the intervening centuries, persons known for their wisdom must have lived in Jerusalem. Koheleth, however, surpassed all of them in wisdom, and this agrees with what is set forth about King Solomon at 1 Kings 4:29–31 (REB). “God gave Solomon deep wisdom and insight, and understanding as wide as the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon’s wisdom surpassed that of all the men of the east and of all Egypt. For he was wiser than any man, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; his fame spread among all the surrounding nations.” (1:16)

Koheleth’s “heart” (*lev*), either meaning his mind or his inner self (he himself) “saw” or had experience with an abundance of wisdom and knowledge. The Hebrew word for “wisdom” (*chokhmáh*) includes the thought of having an extensive fund of knowledge, coupled with the insight or good judgment to use it aright. The possessor of wisdom is one who is competent, usually by reason of experience, in dealing with life’s problems and in presenting sound advice to others. In this case, “knowledge” (*da‘áth*) relates to extensive factual information, information that plumbs the very depths. Wisdom and knowledge had become a part of Koheleth’s innermost self, guiding his thoughts, speech, and judgment. The account at 1 Kings 4:32–34 (REB) portrays Solomon as the possessor of such wisdom and knowledge. “He propounded three thousand proverbs, and his songs numbered a thousand and five. He discoursed of trees,

from the cedar of Lebanon down to the marjoram that grows out of the wall, of beasts and birds, of reptiles and fish. People of all races came to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and he received gifts from all the kings in the world who had heard of his wisdom.” (1:16)

Koheleth “gave” or “set” his heart to know “wisdom,” “madness,” and “folly.” Since the “heart” can represent the inner self, Koheleth may be understood as saying that he applied himself fully to knowing wisdom, madness, and folly. He put his all into this pursuit. If the heart primarily designates the mind in this case, Koheleth would be saying that his mind was focused on this pursuit; he gave it his full attention. The Hebrew verb for “to know” (*yadhá* ‘) signifies to be thoroughly acquainted with, to have intimate personal knowledge gained by experience or diligent study and careful observation. Koheleth’s coming to know wisdom proved to be on a firsthand basis as the possessor of unsurpassed wisdom among his contemporaries. (1:17)

“Madness” denotes “delusion,” “derangement,” “distraction.” It is a distortion of sound judgment, resulting in irrational behavior. Apparently Koheleth came to know madness by studiously observing its manifestation in others. (1:17)

Koheleth also came to know “folly.” This indicates that he became thoroughly acquainted with “senselessness,” “thoughtlessness,” “recklessness.” He must have carefully observed how others acted without reason or good sense. Folly is characterized by an inconsiderate and reckless disregard for what is becoming in speech and conduct. (1:17)

Koheleth’s coming to know madness and folly may also have involved making an assessment or appraisal of these in relation to wisdom. The Septuagint includes no reference to madness and folly. It reads, “And I gave my heart to know wisdom and knowledge; parables and understanding I came to know.” His efforts to come to “know” the things he investigated proved to be disappointing. Koheleth called the result a “striving” or “chasing” after something unsubstantial — wind. (1:17; see the Notes section.)

He came to recognize the troubling consequences an increase in wisdom can have. “For [with] much wisdom — much vexation.” The Hebrew term for “vexation” (*ka’ás*) may also be defined as “irritation,” “disturbance,” “distress.” The Septuagint does not use an equivalent Greek term but reads, “because in abundant wisdom — abundant knowledge.” (1:18)

One who increases in wisdom becomes more aware of the numberless flaws in the realm of human affairs. Limitations imposed by time and circumstances make it difficult, if not impossible, to improve the situation. The wise person may be surrounded by those who stubbornly cling to wrong concepts and reject

sound recommendations. Outnumbered, the wise one may find that any influence for good is quickly nullified. Even if the individual has a position of authority and circumstances are favorable, a relatively short life restricts what can be done. Moreover, there are just too many defects in need of correction. The wide gap existing between what needs to be done and what can be done is overwhelming. So the increase in wisdom can indeed lead to vexation, irritation, or disturbance. (1:18)

Both the Hebrew text and the Septuagint basically read, “he who increases knowledge increases pain.” With increased knowledge, the individual becomes more and more aware of just how much is wrong, about what may be needed to correct flaws, and yet how very little, if anything, can be done to effect change for the good of others. There is intense internal pain, distressing sadness, when one is prevented from using the very knowledge that could benefit others. It hurts when one has to face stubborn resistance and realizes that time for positive action is very limited. (1:18)

Notes:

Numerous translations use “wind” at the beginning of verse 6. “The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course.” (NIV) “The wind blows south, the wind blows north; round and round it blows over and over again.” (CEV) “The wind blows to the south, it veers to the north; round and round it goes and returns full circle.” (REB) “The wind blows to the south, and goes around to the north; round and round goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns.” (NRSV) “Southward goes the wind, then turns to the north; it turns and turns again; then back to its circling goes the wind.” (NJB)

In other contexts, the Hebrew word *rúach* and the Greek word *pneúma* (1:6, 14, 17) mean “spirit,” not “wind.”

The reference in verse 8 could be to “words,” not “things.” A number of translations have rendered the verse to apply to the spoken word. “All speech is laboured; there is nothing man can say.” (NAB) “All words, are weak, unable is any man to tell.” (Rotherham) The Septuagint rendering may be translated, “All the words are tired” or “worn out,” which could mean that the words are overused.

In verses 14 and 17, a number of translations have retained the meaning “spirit” for the Hebrew *rúach* and the Greek *pneúma*. Instead of “striving after wind” or a similar expression, a number of translations read “vexation of spirit” (KJV, Young). In its rendering of the Septuagint, a new English translation (NETS) uses the expression “preference of spirit” and does not include the alternate

meaning “wind” (as it does for verse 6). A German translation of the Septuagint (*Septuaginta Deutsch*), however, reads “a striving after wind” (*ein Streben nach Wind*). The Greek term rendered “preference” or “striving” is *proairesis* and can signify “choice,” “preference,” or “commitment.” Persons who have chosen, preferred, or committed themselves to something that is mere wind could be spoken of as striving after wind.

Ecclesiastes 2:1-26

Koheleth referred to speaking “in his heart,” signifying that he thought to himself. The Hebrew text then reads, “Come now, I will test you with gladness, and see about good. And look! Also this — vanity.” (2:1)

Addressing his “heart” (or himself), Koheleth determined to “try,” or “make an attempt” with, “gladness.” He wanted to try out whatever could delight the senses. The objective was to “see” or to experience “good” or whatever gave promise of being pleasurable. (2:1)

Taking note of what he had done, really looking at it, he appears to have been surprised to find that it was unsatisfying. Like other pursuits he had investigated, the result from “gladness” or mirth also proved to be vain, empty, or meaningless. The end product had no lasting value. (2:1)

Koheleth said of laughter, “insane,” “senseless,” or “mad.” Laughter stemming from attempts to gratify the senses can distort reality, making light of very serious matters. It may conceal the actual feelings of the individual. (Proverbs 14:13) Inappropriate laughter is annoying to observers and makes those indulging in it appear as persons who have lost their senses. When representing matters and situations in a way that is contrary to the facts, laughter is irrational, senseless, insane, or mad. (2:2)

Regarding gladness, Koheleth asked, “What is this doing?” The implied answer is, “Nothing.” At best, pursuing whatever appears to have potential for pleasing the senses produces only fleeting enjoyment. Afterward, the harsh realities that gladness, mirth, or cheer may have masked appear even more distressing than before the brief period of hilarity. (2:2; see the Notes section.)

Koheleth, with his “heart” (his mind or his deep inner self) involved, “investigated” or explored, “drawing out” (*mashákh*) his “flesh” with wine. The literal significance of the Hebrew term *mashákh* is to “draw out” and, in this context, may denote “to excite” or “to stimulate.” Wine, the fermented juice of grapes, does affect the “flesh,” the sensual nature of humankind. (2:3)

Koheleth did not give himself up to unrestrained revelry. “Wisdom” or good judgment continued to be the controlling force. As he expressed matters, “I guided my heart with wisdom.” “Heart” may here signify “mind” or may be representative of Koheleth in his inner self. He spoke of “grasping,” “seizing,” or “taking hold” of “folly,” probably meaning his indulging in the pleasures of life’s lighter side. They are the kind of pleasures that reflect a carefree recklessness, a disregard for possible unpleasant consequences. As was true of Koheleth’s investigation with wine, “wisdom” (sound judgment) exercised a restraint on his endeavor respecting folly. His purpose was to “see” or to discern what was “good” for “earthlings” (literally, “sons of the man [earthling]”) to pursue during their short life (“number of days of their life”) “under the heavens” (on earth beneath the skies). It was a matter of determining whether “wisdom” or “folly” would be better, requiring his being familiar with both in order to make a proper evaluation. (2:3)

Koheleth mentioned his “works,” saying that he made them “great.” These were outstanding accomplishments in construction and cultivation. The reference to his making them great could indicate the works were impressive. Another significance could be that he increased the products of his activity. (2:4) Both meanings can be found in translations. “I undertook great works.” (NAB, REB) “I worked on a grand scale.” (NJB) “I multiplied my possessions.” (Tanakh)

Koheleth engaged in building “houses,” not ordinary abodes but luxurious palaces. According to the scriptural record, Solomon devoted about six years more time in constructing his own palace than he did in building the magnificent temple. For this purpose, he used the best craftsmen. With stone saws, the workers smoothed all sides of the building stones. Likely cedar was used for floors and interior paneling. The paneling may have been adorned with stylized carvings of fruit, plants, blossoms, birds, and beasts, perhaps overlaid with gold and inlaid with ivory. The palace that was constructed for Pharaoh’s daughter must likewise have been an imposing structure. (2:4; 1 Kings 6:29; 7:1-11, 18; 10:18-22)

Koheleth planted vineyards, probably to supply the royal table with choice wine and also to provide a source of revenue. Each vineyard doubtless was surrounded by a wall and equipped with a tower, where a watchman would be stationed. The watchman guarded the produce from theft and from the depredations of animals, particularly foxes. Additionally, keepers were in charge of the vineyards, and they received a percentage of the proceeds for their labors. (2:4; Song of Solomon 2:15; 8:11)

Koheleth developed gardens, likely near the palaces. These gardens would have been enclosed cultivated areas with winding paths. Irrigated or watered by streams, they could support a variety of trees, shrubs, vines, and herbs.

Refreshing shade, coupled with the delightful fragrance of aromatic plants, made the gardens pleasant refuges from the intense summer heat. (2:5)

Koheleth laid out parks. The Hebrew word for “park” (*pardés*) is generally thought to be of foreign derivation. Solomon had extensive contact with other nations. So it would not have been unusual for non-Hebrew words to have been introduced into the language during his reign. (2:5)

The “parks” may have been enclosed preserves that supported a great variety of plant and animal life. Greek historian Xenophon used the term *parádeisos* when describing the enclosed hunting grounds of the Persian kings, and this is also the expression appearing in the Septuagint as a rendering for *pardés*. Likely the hunting done in these parks supplied the deer, gazelles, roebucks, and birds that became part of the daily royal fare. (2:5; 1 Kings 4:23)

Both in the gardens and in the parks, Koheleth planted a variety of “fruit trees.” The trees may have included the apricot, citron, apple, quince, orange, fig, olive and pomegranate. (2:5)

Koheleth constructed “pools” or “reservoirs.” Perhaps through channels, water from these pools flowed into the gardens and parks, making it possible for trees to flourish. Water from the pools served to irrigate “woodland sprouting with trees.” The Hebrew word for “sprout” (*tsamách*) signifies to “spring up” or “sprout luxuriantly.” Therefore, the reference may be to the growth of young trees. (2:6)

Apparently to have sufficient workers for rendering personal services to the entire royal household and maintaining the palace complex, parks, gardens, and other cultivated areas, Koheleth obtained male and females slaves. He also came to have “sons of the house [household].” These “sons” were the offspring of slaves in the king’s service and, therefore, themselves slaves — home-born slaves. (2:7)

Koheleth accumulated more livestock than anyone who preceded him in Jerusalem. Both the cattle herds and the flocks of sheep and goats were extraordinarily large. It may be noted that the daily meat consumption for Solomon’s royal household was tremendous. Thirty cattle and one hundred sheep were slaughtered daily. (1 Kings 4:23) This necessitated raising livestock on an unprecedentedly large scale. (2:7)

Koheleth amassed gold, silver and “treasure of kings and provinces.” “Treasure of kings” denotes the kind of fabulous wealth that only royalty could accumulate. The “treasure of provinces” likely consisted of the costly possessions, including rarities, obtained from the administrative regions with

which Koheleth had dealings. (2:8) His comments reflect circumstances that are described in 1 Kings 10:14-27 (Tanakh). “The weight of the gold which Solomon received every year was 666 talents of gold, besides what came from tradesmen, from the traffic of the merchants, and from all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the regions. ... For the king had a Tarshish fleet on the sea, along with Hiram’s fleet. Once every three years, the Tarshish fleet came in, bearing gold and silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks. King Solomon excelled all the kings on earth in wealth and in wisdom. All the world came to pay homage to Solomon and to listen to the wisdom with which God had endowed him; and each one would bring his tribute — silver and gold objects, robes, weapons and spices, horses and mules — in the amount due each year. ... The king made silver as plentiful in Jerusalem as stones.”

For his own enjoyment and the entertainment of the royal household, Koheleth acquired male and female singers. They may often have sung to the accompaniment of instruments. (Compare Isaiah 23:16.) In group singing, half of the musicians may have alternated with the other half in singing parallel stanzas. At times a soloist may have thus alternated with an entire chorus. (Compare Exodus 15:21; 1 Samuel 18:6, 7.) It is noteworthy that Solomon had great interest in music, as evident from his knowing 1,005 (5,000, LXX) songs. (2:8; 1 Kings 4:32 [3 Kings 5:12, LXX])

Additionally, Koheleth acquired what he called “delights of the sons of the man [the earthling].” In the Tanakh, the expression “sons of the man” is represented as meaning ordinary men, “commoners,” and the Hebrew term for “delights” is rendered “luxuries” (as also in a number of other translations). (2:8)

The “delights” are specified as being *shiddáh weshiddóth*. There is considerable uncertainty about the significance of this Hebrew expression. The Greek terms found in the Septuagint signify “male and female cupbearers,” and the Latin words in the Vulgate mean “cups” and “pitchers.” These renderings seem to have arisen from linking the expression with a Hebrew root denoting to “pour out.” Since the reading of the Syriac is like that of the Septuagint, George Lamsa’s translation says, “I appointed for myself butlers and waitresses.” In the Mishnah, *shiddáh* designates a kind of chest. This meaning, or a more general sense, is reflected in the renderings of various translations (“luxuries of commoners — coffers and coffers of them” [Tanakh]; “every human luxury, chest on chest of it” [NJB]; “everything that affords delight” [REB]; “all human luxuries” [NAB]). (2:8)

The lexicographer Gesenius defined *shiddáh* as meaning “mistress, lady.” When commenting on Ecclesiastes 2:8, he considered the singular *shiddáh* to refer to the “queen,” and the plural *shiddóth* to “the other wives and the concubines of the king.” This is the basic sense that numerous translators have adopted (“the

pleasures of men — many concubines” [NASB], “many concubines, the delights of men” [HCSB]; “many concubines, the delight of the children of man” [ESV]; “all the women a man could ever want” [NCV]; “the luxuries of the sons of man — a wife and wives” [Young]; “the delights of the sons of men, a wife and wives” [Rotherham]; “a harem as well — the delights of the heart of man” [NIV]; “delights of the flesh, and many concubines” [NRSV]). (2:8)

Such renderings make the Hebrew term for “delights” apply to what was particularly delightful or pleasurable to men — “a lady, even ladies.” (2:8) Koheleth does speak elsewhere (9:9) about enjoying life with a wife. Moreover, the words of the Song of Solomon (6:8-10, Tanakh) indicate that the king found delight in women. “There are sixty queens, and eighty concubines, and damsels without number. Only one is my dove, my perfect one, the only one of her mother, the delight of her who bore her. Maidens see and acclaim her; queens and concubines, and praise her. Who is she that shines through like the dawn, beautiful as the moon, radiant as the sun, awesome as bannered hosts?”

Commenting on his attainments, Koheleth continued, “I became great and increased more than all who were before me in Jerusalem.” His becoming “great” and increasing may relate to his coming to exercise extensive dominion and amassing tremendous wealth, surpassing all who had lived in Jerusalem since its founding. Despite his varied pursuits, he did not deplete his resources but continued to become wealthier. (2:9)

Regarding wisdom, Koheleth said, “My wisdom remained with me.” He did not lose good judgment, becoming a dissipated pleasure-seeker. Instead, the wisdom with which he had been endowed continued to be his possession. Wisdom (sound judgment) guided everything that he undertook. (2:9)

As king, with unparalleled resources at his disposal, Koheleth could pursue whatever appealed to him. Whenever his “eyes” beheld something that appeared desirable, he did not deny them from beholding as a possession the object upon which they had initially fixed their gaze. Anything that he really wanted proved to be attainable. Koheleth did not hold back his “heart” (his inmost self) from any kind of “gladness,” from anything that he perceived as being conducive to pleasure. (2:10)

He added, “My heart rejoiced in all my labor [*‘amál*].” His “heart” may be understood as signifying Koheleth himself, indicating that he found delight in all his accomplishments. This joy, delight, or pleasure was his lot, portion or reward for all his labor. The Hebrew term for “labor” (*‘amál*) conveys the thought of heavy, wearying, or exhausting labor, suggesting that Koheleth’s attainments required a tremendous expenditure of time and effort. (2:10)

“Turning,” considering, looking at or surveying all the “work” his “hands had done” — the “labor” at which he “labored” to achieve what he did — Koheleth experienced a feeling of emptiness, dissatisfaction. Everything was “vanity,” meaninglessness, purposelessness, or futility. It was all a chasing after “wind” (*ráach*), a striving after what lacked any real substance. There was no advantage, profit, or gain from anything “under the sun.” This proved to be so because nothing could be enjoyed permanently in the earthly realm beneath that celestial body. (2:11)

Again, Koheleth “turned,” possibly to take a closer look. His “turning” may, on the other hand, simply indicate the introduction of a new subject. He wanted to “see,” consider, or examine “wisdom,” “madness,” and “folly,” appraising or evaluating their relative worth. Personal experience and careful observation proved to be the basis for this appraisal. (2:12)

“Wisdom” would include one’s having an extensive fund of knowledge, coupled with the insight or good judgment to use it properly and for the benefit of others. Wise persons are competent, usually by reason of experience, in dealing with life’s problems and in being able to give sound advice to others. “Madness” refers to delusion, derangement, or distraction. It is a distortion of sound judgment, giving rise to speaking and behaving in an irrational manner and violating customary standards of propriety. “Folly” manifests itself in an inconsiderate and reckless disregard for what is becoming in speech and conduct. (2:12)

Perhaps to discourage others from making a similar attempt, Koheleth added, “For what the man who comes after the king?” The reading of the Septuagint does not depart as greatly as may appear on the surface. A literal reading of the Greek is, “For what [the] man who will come after the counsel?” The reason for the use of “counsel,” instead of “king,” is readily apparent. Written Hebrew and Aramaic consisted of consonants only, and an Aramaic word for “counsel” (found at Dan. 4:24 [verse 27, most translations]) has the same consonants as the Hebrew word for “king.” So the Septuagint rendering reflects the basic Hebrew/Aramaic consonantal text. (2:12; see the Notes section for comments on the LXX rendering.)

Many understand the “man” to be a royal successor. “What can the successor of a king do ... ?” (NJB) “What more can the king’s successor do ... ?” (NIV) “What can the next king do ... ?” (CEV) The Hebrew term for “man,” however, is *’adhám*, (“earthling”) and so could mean an ordinary man. (2:12)

To make the question in the original-language text understandable, a verb has to be supplied. The question may be rendered in two ways: (1) “For what *can* the man *do* who comes after the king?” or (2) “For what *is* the man who comes after

the king?” The insertion of “can do” or “will do” seems to fit the flow of thought better. (2:12)

The answer to the question is (1) “what they did already” or (2) “what they already did to him.” According to the first literal rendering of the Hebrew, the man coming after the king would be able to do nothing more than people had already done. Lacking the resources and advantages of the king, an ordinary man would simply be repeating what others had already accomplished. Nothing new would be learned. In fact, because of having so little at his disposal for making the kind of examination undertaken by the king, he would only be able to cover *some* of the same ground. (2:12)

If the “man” is to be regarded as a successor to the throne, this would signify that he would basically do what the former king had done. The nature of the accomplishments and pursuits would follow a similar pattern. (2:12) “For instance, what can the successor of a king do? What has been done already.” (NJB) “I [Kohaleth] asked myself, ‘What can the next king do that I have not already done?’” (CEV) “What more can the king’s successor do than what has already been done?” (NIV)

Considering Kohaleth’s words to mean “what they already did,” the question could be rendered, “For what is the man who succeeds the king upon whom people earlier had bestowed royal dignity?” The thought would then be that Kohaleth’s conclusion about the vanity of his works was due to his not knowing what the royal successor would be like. By transposing the word order and thereby endeavouring to avoid a seeming abrupt change of thought, the Tanakh (2:11, 12) conveys a similar meaning. “Then my thoughts turned to all the fortune my hands had built up, to the wealth I had acquired and won — and oh, it was all futile and pursuit of wind; there was no real value under the sun! For what will the man be like who will succeed the one who is ruling over what was built up long ago? My thoughts also turned to appraising wisdom and madness and folly.”

Kohaleth “saw” or discerned that “wisdom” was of greater value (*yithróhn*, “advantage” or “gain”) than “folly.” Persons who act wisely, with sound judgment, are certainly far better off than those who act foolishly. Wise persons avoid the problems and frustrations that come from ignoring future consequences. Guided by wisdom, they are better equipped to deal with life’s problems, give sound advice when asked, and do not waste their energies and resources on reckless or purposeless endeavors. Those who act foolishly, on the other hand, heedlessly disregard the injury their words and actions can cause. As a result, they repeatedly find themselves in problematic situations from which they find it almost impossible to extricate themselves. Often the problems they make for themselves leave no room for viable options or solutions. (2:13)

The superiority of wisdom over folly is comparable to the superiority of light over darkness. Much more can be accomplished in the light than in the darkness. Light makes it possible to see dangers and to avoid them, while darkness obscures and conceals hazards. (2:13)

The eyes of a wise person are in his head. They are where they should be, enabling him to see clearly the course that is appropriate under the circumstances. He sees where he is going and avoids obstacles that could cause him to stumble. The “fool” (the person who lacks good sense in the practical affairs of life and who deliberately refuses to follow an upright course) “walks in darkness.” He simply does not see where his feet are taking him. His whole life is characterized by a reckless disregard of what is appropriate in speech and conduct. Despite the fact that wisdom is better than folly, the wise person and the foolish one share the same inevitable outcome — death. When it comes to death itself, wise persons have no advantage over individuals who fail to use good judgment. (2:14)

Speaking within himself, in his “heart,” Koheleth concluded that the ultimate end of the fool would also befall him. This prompted his question, “And why have I become wise?” (LXX) The Hebrew text reads, “And why should I be wise—I—then [*'az*] gain [*yohthér*]?” (2:15; see the Notes section.)

The Hebrew word for “and” may also be understood to mean “then” in this case. Quite a number of translators render the first two words of the question as “why, then.” This rendering, however, does not preserve the distinction between the Hebrew word for “and” (represented by the letter “waw”[W]) and “then” (*'az*), the term occurring later in the question. (2:15)

Numerous translators have viewed the Hebrew word *yohthér* (“what remains,” “what is over and above,” “advantage”) as qualifying wise, and this has given rise to such renderings as “so very wise” (ESV, NLB, NRSV), “overly wise” (HCSB), and “extremely wise” (NASB). The Hebrew may, however, also be understood to express two separate thoughts. “To what purpose have I been wise? Where is the profit?” (REB) Although considering *yohthér* to mean “profit,” “gain,” or “advantage,” numerous translators have expressed the thought of the Hebrew text as one question. “What then do I gain by being wise?” (NIV) “To what advantage, then, have I been wise?” (Tanakh) “Being wise got me nowhere!” (CEV) “What is the point of my having been wise?” (NJB) These renderings do seem to fit the context well. Wisdom provides no gain or advantage in the ultimate end, for both the wise one and the foolish one die. (2:15)

Koheleth said to himself, in his “heart,” “this also is vanity.” In view of the certainty of his own death, he sensed that his having become wise was meaningless, empty, futile, or purposeless. (2:15)

As is true of the “fool” (the one acting recklessly and defying sound judgment), the wise person is not remembered “forever” (*‘ohlám*, time without a set limit). For both of them, a future remembrance is temporary. There simply is no enduring memory. In the “days” to come, “all” will be forgotten. Koheleth then asked, “How will the wise one die?” The answer is, “with the fool,” or “like the fool.” (2:16)

The fact that nothing would endure caused Koheleth to look upon life, with its accompanying toil, as frustrating, empty. He spoke of hating or loathing life. This does not mean that he hated being alive but that he loathed the mundane existence that would terminate in death and reduce all the products of the exhausting toil to nothingness. This is evident from what he specifically refers to as his reason for “hating” life — because “evil” (*ra’*, “bad,” “calamitous,” “disagreeable,” “undesirable”) to me was the “work” (“doing”) that was “done” under the sun, in the earthly realm that is dependent on the sun for light and warmth. (2:17)

All the activity, the continual hustle and bustle, that is a daily part of human affairs accomplishes nothing that endures. Everything is subject to coming to a comparatively swift end. Koheleth added, “All [is] vanity and a chasing after wind.” Absolutely nothing had any permanent value. Because of belonging to the realm of the temporary, everything proved to be empty, meaningless, vain, or futile. No human accomplishment, regardless of how impressive it might appear, would remain forever. So everything in the realm of human endeavor was a chasing after “wind” (*rúach*, also meaning “spirit”), a meaningless pursuit after something that had no enduring substance. (2:17; see the Notes section for verses 11, 17, and 26.)

Koheleth hated “all [his] labour” (the sum total of the products of his toiling) for which he “labored.” Both the Hebrew noun and verb forms for “labor” and “to labor” convey the thought of wearying or exhausting toil. By repetition, the expression “all my labor in which I labored” stresses the wearying aspect associated with his achievements. The reason for Koheleth’s hatred was that the products of his exhausting labour (performed “under the sun” or in the earthly realm beneath the sun) would come to nothing. Despite his having expended much time and great effort, he would be forced to leave everything behind to his successor. (2:18)

This was frustrating for him, for neither he nor any other human knew whether the successor would prove to be wise or foolish. Koheleth simply could not

determine beforehand what would become of all that he had built up. He had no assurance that the products of his toil would survive because of coming into his successor's possession. Regardless of whether the successor would prove to be wise or foolish, he would still take control over the "labor" (the products of the toiling) for which Koheleth had "labored." (2:19)

Koheleth added that he had shown himself to be "wise" or "skillful" in this exhausting laboring. So, besides much effort, great skill was required for all that Koheleth achieved in the mundane realm ("under the sun"). The thought of leaving everything to a successor who could be either wise or foolish brought Koheleth to the conclusion that "this also is vanity." In the hands of a foolish successor, everything could quickly be brought to ruin. (2:19)

With the benefit of the historical perspective, one can, for example, see that much of what Solomon achieved during his reign proved to have been futile or in vain. His successor, Rehoboam, foolishly heeded the advice of inexperienced counselors. This prompted ten tribes to revolt, leaving him as king over only two tribes — Judah and Benjamin. Because of disloyalty to YHWH, Rehoboam and his subjects lost divine favor and protection. In the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign, the Egyptian ruler Shishak (Sheshonk I) invaded his realm, captured numerous cities, and seized much of the wealth that Solomon had amassed. Thus the extensive realm and great prosperity that had existed during Solomon's reign came to a sudden end. A greatly weakened and impoverished kingdom remained. (1 Kings 12:1–20; 14:21–27; 2 Chronicles 12:1–10).

After sober reflection, Koheleth gave up his "heart" (his inmost self or his mind) to despair over all that he had built up through his wearisome laboring "under the sun" (in the mundane sphere). He felt downcast in spirit because all the exhausting laboring had produced nothing of enduring value. (2:20)

Koheleth repeated the observation about a man's "labour" (what is produced through wearisome toil). What a person achieved required "wisdom" (skill), "knowledge" (a fund of information and thought), and "ability" (*kishróhn*, "usefulness," "success," "skill"; *andreía* [LXX], "manliness," "with a manly spirit," "with fortitude"). Yet all that a man may have built up would come to belong to one who had not labored in this way. Because of not having expended time and great effort, the heir may have very little appreciation for the inheritance and soon squander everything. Koheleth saw sheer vanity, emptiness or meaninglessness in this outcome of the wearisome toil. He also called it "great evil" ("misfortune" or "calamity"). (2:21)

Koheleth raised the question as to what a man comes to have for all his "labor" (the product of his exhausting toil), and for the "striving of his heart," with which he "labors" under the sun" (in the earthly realm beneath the sun). The

striving of the heart may signify the anxious care of the mind or the inner self. In the Septuagint, the rendering of the Hebrew word for “striving” is *proairesis*, meaning “choice,” “preference,” or “commitment,” and has also been translated “striving” (*Streben*, Septuaginta Deutsch). In the context of this verse, however, the Greek text could be understood to mean that the laboring involved a choice of the “heart,” either the person’s mind or the individual’s inner self. (2:22)

The implied answer to Koheleth’s question is that the individual gains nothing from his arduous laboring. “All his days” (throughout his entire life) the man’s “occupation” (business, task, or activity) is associated with “pains” and “vexation” or “grief.” Even at night he is unable to get any rest. “His heart” (his mind, his inner self, or he himself) remains in a state of disturbance; it does not “lie down.” There simply is no such thing as a peaceful repose. Koheleth sums up the situation with the words, “this also is vanity” (meaninglessness, emptiness, purposelessness, or futility). (2:23)

Since nothing lasting can be produced in the mundane sphere, Koheleth (according to a literal reading of the Hebrew) continued, “No good for a man, that he should eat and drink and have his soul see good in his labor. Also this I saw—that it [is] from the hand of God.” The introductory “no good” could signify “no good other than,” or that “there is nothing better than.” (2:24) “There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and provide himself with good things by his labors.” (NAB). “There is nothing worthwhile for a man but to eat and drink and afford himself enjoyment with his means.” (Tanakh) “A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work.” (NIV). “There is no happiness except in eating and drinking, and in enjoying one’s achievements.” (NJB)

It could be, however, that the eating, drinking, and seeing good from labor are not to be viewed as a good depending on man. This sense is expressed in the rendering of *The Revised English Bible*. “To eat and drink and experience pleasure in return for his labours, this does not come from any good in a person: it comes from God.” (2:24)

Another possibility is that “no good” denotes “not a genuine good,” not a good in the true sense of the word. This, though, appears less likely, since it does not fit in well with the point that “his soul should see good.” (2:24)

Whether signifying “no good other than” or “not a good depending on man,” the basic meaning about enjoyment is the same. For “his soul” (he himself) to “see good” would mean for the worker to be able to enjoy the fruit of his labor, experiencing personal benefit from what he has accomplished. Accordingly, he should use his means in a way that brings him wholesome pleasure. (2:24)

Koheleth referred to one's being able to "eat," "drink," and "see good" from one's labour (the products of wearying toil) as coming from "the hand of God." It is a divine gift, for God has endowed humans with the capacity to work and to enjoy what can be obtained through exhausting labor. (2:24)

Speaking about enjoyment from experience, Koheleth raised the question, "Who eats and who rejoices [*chush*, literally, 'hastens,' but here probably meaning to 'rejoice' or to 'find pleasure'] except for me?" The Septuagint associates the question with God. "Who shall eat, or who shall drink ['refrain' (from eating), according to another manuscript reading], without him?" (2:25) A similar rendering is found in a number of translations. "For who can eat or drink apart from him?" (NAB) "For who could get anything to eat or drink, unless all this came from him?" (NJB). "For without God who can eat with enjoyment?" (REB)

Koheleth mentioned what God has given to the "man who is good before his face [before him]." This would be the "man" (the earthling), who pleases God by living an upright life and coming to the aid of persons in real need. To such a one, God gives "wisdom," "knowledge," and "joy." The Most High provides the basis for wisdom and knowledge. His commands make a person truly wise, enabling the individual to use assets and abilities in beneficial ways. "Knowledge" consists of thorough acquaintance with all divinely given guidelines. One's acting in harmony with the wisdom and knowledge that have the Creator as their source results in the very best way of life possible in one's circumstances, contributing to joy. Apart from an approved relationship with God, true wisdom, knowledge, and joy are missing. (2:26)

The sinner is one who deliberately chooses to ignore God's commands and is, therefore, deprived of the essential wisdom and knowledge that contribute to real joy. The occupation or pursuit that God has "given" to the sinner (allowed to be the sinner's lot) is a gathering and an amassing of belongings that will eventually be given to the "one who is good before God [literally, 'before the face of God']," the person who pleases his Maker. Without the benefit of divine guidance, the sinner goes ahead with his selfish pursuits, piling up possessions without ever experiencing any real contentment. He may be totally consumed by his toiling, always thinking up new schemes for increasing his belongings. To achieve his ends, he may resort to lawless means. Eventually his wrongdoing may catch up with him. According to the Mosaic law that was in effect in Koheleth's time, he would have to make restitution to those whom he defrauded. (Exodus 22:1–9) Thus he would lose all his ill-gotten gain. Koheleth fittingly added, "this also is vanity and a chasing after wind." It is purposelessness, futility, or emptiness, and a pursuit of what has no substance. (2:26; see the Notes section regarding verses 11, 17, and 26.)

Notes:

In verse 2, the question in the Septuagint is, “Why are you doing this?”

The Hebrew word *rúach* and its Greek equivalent *pneúma* can mean either “wind” or “spirit.” Instead of “striving after wind” or a similar expression (in verses 11, 17, and 26), a number of translations read “vexation of spirit” (KJV, Young). In its rendering of the Septuagint, a new English translation (NETS) uses the expression “preference of spirit,” whereas *The Orthodox Study Bible* says “choice of one’s spirit.” A German translation of the Septuagint (*Septuaginta Deutsch*), however, reads “a striving after wind” (*ein Streben nach Wind*). The Greek term rendered “preference,” “choice,” or “striving” is *proaíresis* and can also signify “commitment.” Persons who have committed themselves to, chosen, or preferred something that is mere wind could be spoken of as striving after wind.

In verse 12, the words of the Septuagint could be translated, “For who is the man who will follow after the counsel insofar as he did it?” *The Orthodox Study Bible* says, “For who is the man who will follow after counsel, whatever it is, to do it?” *A New English Translation of the Septuagint* reads, “For who is the person who will come to follow the plan [counsel, footnote] in as many things as he made it.” The German translation of the Septuagint (*Septuaginta Deutsch*) renders the Greek text, “For who is the man who will follow the counsel insofar as he has carried it out?” (*denn wer ist der Mensch, der dem Ratschlag folgen wird, insofern er ihn ausgeführt hat?*) An alternate rendering in the footnote reads, “For who is the man who will follow the counsel insofar as he (himself) has given it?” (*denn wer ist der Mensch, der dem Ratschlag folgen wird, insofern er ihn (selbst) gegeben hat?*)

The Septuagint (in verse 15) departs significantly from the reading of the Masoretic Text after the question (“And why have I become wise?”). “Then I excessively said in my heart, Because the fool will speak out of excess, this also indeed [is] vanity.” Koheleth’s observation suggests that the many words of a fool are vain, empty, or worthless.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

“For everything — time,” said Koheleth. The Hebrew word for time (*zemán*) designates a “specific time,” an “appointed time.” The thought appears to be that everything has its particular time. Koheleth follows this up with the words, “and time for every affair under the heavens” (on earth beneath the skies). The Hebrew term for “time” (*’eth*) may denote a “proper time,” a “fit time,” a “seasonable time.” It corresponds to the Greek *kairós* (LXX), which is used with reference to a limited portion of time and can convey the idea of aptness or

suitableness. The thought expressed may be that every affair has its brief, suitable time. (3:1)

The “affair” is part of the ever-changing cyclical earthly scene. Its time cannot last. The Hebrew word for “affair” or “business” (*chéphets*) may also signify “joy,” “pleasure,” “desire,” or “wish,” and the corresponding Greek term (*prágma*, LXX) can mean “matter,” “affair,” or “business.” (3:1)

A baby develops in the womb, and the “time” comes for it to be born. In contrast to birth, the “time” eventually comes when old age or sickness leads to death. (3:2)

The kind of crop and its growing season limit the “time” for “planting.” The “time” also comes to “uproot.” Weeds that would interfere with the growth of the planted crop must be pulled. Some plants may need to be uprooted to avoid overcrowding. Whatever becomes useless or fails to bear fruit has to be removed. Harvesting, too, may involve uprooting. Anciently, flax was harvested by being pulled up. (3:2)

There is a “time to kill.” God’s law authorized capital punishment for deliberate murder, decreed that extremely dangerous animals should be put to death, and permitted taking the lives of animals for food. (Genesis 9:3–6; Exodus 21:28, 29) On the other hand, there is a time to heal. An injured or sickly person or animal must be treated to promote healing. (3:3)

There is a “time to tear down.” Buildings weakened by decay or neglect may have to be torn down. The “time” also comes for “building,” erecting new houses and other structures. (3:3)

The loss of a loved one in death is certainly a “time to weep.” But a joyous occasion, such as a wedding, is a “time to laugh.” Both sorrow and joy can be spontaneous expressions of the deep inner self. The “mourning” or “wailing” and “dancing” next mentioned, however, may reflect actions of choice appropriate to sad and happy events. There is a “time” for both. Among the ancients, professional mourners wailed loudly over the deceased. In contrast to such mourning, joyous happenings occasioned dancing. (3:4; Exodus 15:20; 2 Samuel 6:16; Matthew 11:16, 17; Luke 15:25-27, 31, 32)

The words about a “time” for “casting away stones” and a “time” for “gathering stones” have been variously understood. Stones might be rejected as unsuitable for building purposes, whereas other stones are selected for construction work. They could be gathered for erecting monuments and discarded when tearing down such memorials. Conquering armies threw stones into fields to interfere with essential farming operations. (2 Kings 3:19, 25) Gathering stones could

involve clearing fields of stones. An ancient Rabbinical view interprets the casting away of stones as signifying sexual intercourse and the gathering as a refraining from such intercourse. This view would link the thought more directly to the words that follow about embracing. The Septuagint, though, employs the word *lithos* ("stone"), and there is insufficient evidence for departing from the basic meaning. (3:5)

There is a "time to embrace" and a "time" to "refrain" from embracing. Relatives or close friends may embrace or hug one another in expression of their affection. (Genesis 29:13; 33:4; 48:10; Song of Solomon 2:6) Embraces associated with the intimacies of marriage have their time and place. In the case of persons outside the marriage bond, it is a "time" to refrain from such embracing. (Prov. 5:20) Even for marriage mates there is a "time" to abstain from it. (Leviticus 20:18; 1 Corinthians 7:5) Anciently, whenever a mission was urgent, it was not a time for extended greetings, including embracing. (3:5; 2 Kings 4:29; Luke 10:4)

There is a "time" to "seek" or "search." Shepherds diligently searched for lost sheep. (Luke 15:4) Considerable effort might be put forth to "search" for lost valuables. (Luke 15:8) When the "search" has continued to the point where there is no hope of finding what was lost, the "time" comes "to give up." The search may also prove to be too risky or dangerous in view of circumstances. It then is a "time" for losing or giving up as lost. The seeking could also involve the proper pursuit of gain. Then, due to unfavorable circumstances beyond one's control, the "time" may come for losing what was obtained. (3:6)

A "time" exists for "keeping" items that are valuable and useful. When retaining possessions would hinder movement to a place of safety or interfere with one's well-being, however, it is a "time" for "throwing away." For example, sailors, to lighten a vessel during a storm, would cast valuable cargo and equipment overboard, thereby increasing the possibility of surviving the disaster. (Acts 27:18, 19) An item may cease to have value or may come to be recognized as harmful. At that point the "time" has come for throwing it away. (3:6; Acts 19:19)

There is a "time" for "ripping apart." The Hebrews customarily ripped garments to the point of exposing the breast when experiencing great distress, grief, or shock. (Genesis 37:29, 34; Judges 11:35; Matthew 26:65; Acts 14:14) Once the occasion that prompted the ripping action had passed, the "time" came for mending the tear. A need for new garments also meant that the "time" had come "to sew." (3:7)

When listening is in order (as when receiving instructions), it is a "time" for keeping quiet. There are occasions, however, when it is definitely a "time to

speak.” A witness to serious wrongdoing was under obligation to present testimony upon hearing the solemn adjuration pronounced by the judges. (Leviticus 5:1) It was also a time to speak up in defense of those falsely accused. (3:7; Proverbs 24:11, 12)

The reference to times for “love” and “hate” and for “war” and “peace” simply indicates that such times exist in human affairs, without any indication as to whether the emotions or actions were right or wrong. For example, Amnon’s erotic love for his half sister Tamar changed to hatred after his raping her. (2 Samuel 13:15) During David’s reign it was often a time for war in stopping foreign aggression and in extending the boundaries of Israel to the divinely ordained limits. By contrast, Solomon’s reign was a time of peace. In the face of enemy threats, rulers had to decide whether it was in the national interest to fight or to sue for peace. (3:8; Luke 14:31, 32)

The “time” for the things Koheleth enumerated is usually imposed by circumstances that are not a matter of deliberate choice. Since much of what happens in human affairs is not under one’s control, Koheleth raised the question, “What gain [does] the worker [have] from his labor?” Though of a wearying or exhausting nature, toil brings no real gain or advantage. This is because of life’s many uncertainties. Whatever is produced simply will not last, and circumstances beyond human control may quickly undo what has been accomplished. So, in itself, the laboring is not the means for attaining happiness. It cannot guarantee a secure future. (3:9)

Koheleth commented that he had seen the “business,” “occupation,” “task,” or “employment” that God has given to humankind (“sons of the man [the earthling]”) in which to “busy” themselves. From the standpoint of personal experience and careful observation, he did indeed “see.” The “business” appears to apply to human labor in general — all of the activity that is essential in order to live. What God has given to humankind, what he has permitted to be the lot of earthlings, has proved to be an empty “occupation.” It produces nothing of truly enduring value. (3:10)

This occupation of sinful earthlings differs markedly from the “work of God.” The Most High has made everything “beautiful,” “apt,” or “appropriate” in its “time.” Whatever he does or allows to take place always occurs when it is appropriate. The “time” is never too early nor too late with reference to the outworking of his purposes. (3:11)

God has also put “eternity” (*’ohlám*, time without a specified limit) into the “hearts” of humans. Unlike animals, which are strictly creatures of the present, man alone has a sense of the past, present, and future. Because of possessing a concept of “eternity” in the “heart” (the deep inner self), man is aware of the

existence of an indefinite past and an indefinite future. This realization of time stretching endlessly in both directions from the present impresses on man his serious limitation in trying to grasp the whole of God's work. Humans know only a minute fraction of the whole. Therefore, they can never grasp, fathom, or discover "the work that God has done from beginning to end." (3:11)

It is impossible for any person or group of persons to discover from fragmentary knowledge some way to determine what God may do or permit in the outworking of his purpose. There is no way for anyone to ascertain how any one occurrence or any combination of events fit into the work of God. The future cannot be predicted with accuracy. (3:11)

In the Scriptures, whatever God may permit is spoken of as his doing, his "work." This is because he could prevent it from taking place. For example, when Joseph referred to his being sold by his half brothers, he spoke of this as being done by God. (Genesis 45:5-8) The Almighty did use the circumstance of Joseph's being sold to work out his purpose respecting the Israelites. At the time of the sale, however, there was no way for anyone to know how this event in its "time" would affect future developments and how it fitted into God's overall purpose. (3:11)

Seemingly, because everything has its time and humans cannot determine just how their fragmentary view fits into the overall picture, Koheleth focused on getting wholesome enjoyment from life. According to a literal reading of the Hebrew text and the Septuagint, he said, "I know that no good [is (included in LXX)] in them except to rejoice and to do good in his life [plural of life in the Hebrew text, but singular in LXX]." (3:12)

The reference to "no good" is commonly considered to mean "nothing better," or "the only worthwhile thing." Another significance could be that, through human effort, no permanent good can be attained, leaving the individual only with the possibility of a temporary enjoyment of life. Even this possibility, as expressed in the next verse, depends upon God. (3:12)

Besides getting enjoyment from the results of their "occupation," "task," or "business" (3:10), people should also be doing "good." If, though, Koheleth's words indicate that "no good" depends upon humankind, the implied thought would be that their enjoying life and doing good are really dependent on God. (3:12)

The "doing of good" may be understood in one of two ways — (1) doing good for others, or (2) doing good for oneself. Those who favor the second meaning base this primarily on the lack of any specific reference to the doing of good for others. It should be noted, though, that earlier in Ecclesiastes mention is made of

the one who is good before God. (2:26) The person proving himself to be good before God would certainly be doing positive good for others. Accordingly, there is a basis for concluding that Koheleth's words may denote a doing of good for others, using resources and assets for the benefit of fellow humans. (3:12)

The third person plural ("they") probably means people generally, whereas the third person singular ("his") would then apply to the individual. So Koheleth may be saying that he knew or recognized that the best thing for people to do was to enjoy themselves and individually to do good throughout their whole life (as the Hebrew plural form of "life" might suggest), not just during part of it. (3:12) "I know that there is nothing good for anyone except to be happy and live the best life he can while he is alive." (REB) "I realized that the only worthwhile thing there is for them is to enjoy themselves and do what is good in their lifetime." (Tanakh) "I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live." (NIV)

Further developing the idea of enjoyment and its source, Koheleth continued, "And also that every man may eat and drink and see good for all his labor — this [is] God's gift." Humans were to enjoy food and drink. The "labor," the wearisome or exhausting toil, would provide the means for seeing or experiencing "good," things that are pleasurable. (3:13)

One's finding joy in life depends on God. This is so because nothing occurs without his direct action or his permission. Therefore, wholesome pleasures — food, drink, or anything else — are his gift. (3:13)

Humans are unable to change anything that God may do or allow to occur. As Koheleth pointed out earlier, everything has its time in the ever-changing cyclical events on earth. With apparent reference to this reality, he said, "I know that all God does shall be forever; nothing can be added to it, nor taken away from it." The Hebrew term (*'ohlām*) rendered "forever" denotes time without a set limit. Accordingly, as long as the Most High so wills, whatever he does or allows to affect humankind will stand. Any human effort to make a change — any addition or subtraction — will fail. (3:14) Even the mighty ruler of ancient Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, had to admit, "He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him, 'What have you done?'" (Daniel 4:35, NIV)

From the human standpoint, what God does (or permits) can neither be altered nor fathomed. This should cause people to have a wholesome fear of the Most High. As Koheleth observed, "God has done [it] so that they [people] should fear before his face [before him]." This fear is no morbid dread; it is a wholesome, reverential awe. (3:14)

Although the work of God (including everything that he allows to occur) is beyond human comprehension and control, there are repetitive cycles — birth and death, planting and harvesting, weeping and laughing, war and peace. Accordingly, the present is a reflection of the past, and the future will be a time for repeating former events. So Koheleth noted, “Whatever is has already been, and whatever will be has already been.” (3:15)

His next words may be variously understood. The Hebrew text reads, “And God seeks what is pursued.” Both the Hebrew term *radáph* and the corresponding Greek word *dióko* (LXX) signify “pursue,” “chase,” or “persecute.” Koheleth next mentioned the flawed administration of justice. Therefore, God’s seeking might refer to his seeking the good of those who suffer unjustly. (3:15) “God seeks out anyone who is persecuted.” (NJB)

It may be, however, that the thought is, “God seeks what is chased away.” What has been “chased away” is no more. It has disappeared. So, God could be referred to as seeking it in the sense of causing or allowing it to happen again. Accordingly, what had been chased away is brought back into full view. (3:15) “Whatever is has been already, and whatever is to come has been already, with God summoning each event back in its turn.” (REB) “God does everything over and over again.” (CEV) “God makes the same things happen again and again.” (NCV) “God allows the same things to happen again.” (NLB)

Although there is uncertainty about the exact significance of Koheleth’s statement, the main point is clear. Whereas events in the mundane realm are repetitive and there seems to be nothing new, God is actively involved in developments on earth and, unlike humans, is in control of all events — past, present, and future. This implies that injustices will eventually be rectified despite appearances to the contrary. (3:15)

“Under the sun” (in the realm of human affairs, on earth beneath the sun), Koheleth saw that wickedness prevailed in the very place where justice should have been administered. He must have observed judges acting with partiality, favoring the rich and influential even when they were clearly in the wrong. Corrupt judges would have been accepting bribes from the guilty ones and then pronounced such persons innocent, letting them escape deserved punishment. As Koheleth added, wickedness existed where righteousness should have been expected. On the basis of false testimony, the righteous were condemned, and the wicked attained their objectives through bribery. (3:16)

Nevertheless, Koheleth expressed confidence in the decision of a higher Judge, one whose judgment will always be just. In his “heart” (in thought or within himself), Koheleth said, “God will judge the righteous and the wicked.” His

reason for reaching this conclusion was that “[there is] a time for every matter and for every work.” (3:17)

The righteous are those who lead upright lives. Their words and actions are governed by a good conscience and what they know to be the divine will. Wicked ones, on the other hand, disregard the voice of conscience and deliberately choose to ignore divine standards. They are a law to themselves. To attain their unworthy ends, they trample on the rights of others and make use of whatever unscrupulous means are at their disposal. (3:17)

Regarding the words “there is” (which are not in the Hebrew text, but may be understood from the context), a footnote in the Tanakh reads, “Shift of a diacritical point yields ‘He has set.’” This would mean that the Most High has set “a time for every matter and for every work.” (3:17) “So I told myself that God has set a time and a place for everything.” (CEV) “God has planned a time for every thing and every action.” (NCV)

The Hebrew term for “time” (*‘eth*) and the corresponding Greek word *kairós* (LXX) can denote an “apt,” “proper,” “suitable,” “fit,” or “seasonable” time. The focus seems to be on a comparatively brief but “appropriate time.” Every “matter,” “affair,” or “business” has its time in the ever-changing cyclical realm of human activity, and there is also a time for every “work.” Accordingly, there definitely is a time for God to judge the righteous and the wicked. (3:17)

Koheleth’s words about God’s judgment seem to shed light on his next statement. Regarding the “sons of men” (“sons of the man” or “the earthling”), Koheleth said in his “heart” (in thought or within himself), “God tests them so that they may see that they are beasts.” (3:18)

The Hebrew term rendered “test” (*barár*) has been defined as meaning “purge out,” “sort,” “separate,” “select,” or “prove.” In the Septuagint, the corresponding Greek word is *diakrino*, signifying “separate,” “make a distinction,” or “discriminate.” The “selecting,” “separating,” or “proving” may have reference to what God allows humans to experience — problems, uncertainties, trials, failures, successes, and joys — in order to reveal whether they are righteous or wicked and, hence, what their judgment will be. This proving or testing also serves the divine purpose in making humans aware of their helplessness and mortality. In this way they are brought to the realization that they are like beasts in sharing the same end of life. (3:18)

Koheleth commented that humans (“sons of the man”) and beasts share the same eventual outcome or “fate.” “As one dies, so the other dies. All have the same spirit, and man has no advantage over the beast, for all [is] vanity.” The Hebrew word that may be translated “fate” (*miqréh*) denotes a happening or occurrence

that is not controlled or chosen by the one affected and has no apparent originator. It is a chance occurrence or event. With the exception of suicide and murder, death is such an occurrence, befalling both man and beast. (3:19)

Humans and animals have the same spirit (*rúach*) or life force — an animating life principle that is sustained by breathing. As respects this life force and the inevitability of death, man enjoys no advantage over the animals. At death, all activity ends for both; there simply is no permanence. Therefore, everything is “vanity,” “meaninglessness,” “purposelessness,” or “emptiness.” (3:19)

Man and beast go to the same place, the lifeless elements of the ground. According to Genesis chapter 2, both animals and man were formed out of soil. At death, both return to the dust, the very elements from which they were created. (3:20)

Based on observation, no one can answer the question as to whether the spirit of humans ascends upward and that of the animals downward. The implication of the question, though, is that Koheleth perceived a difference between man and animals as respects future life prospects. Later he said that “the spirit returns to God” (12:7), seemingly expressing the same thought as does the reference to the ascent of the spirit. Because future life prospects rest with God (in the realm above the sun), he alone can restore the life principle. In the case of humans, Koheleth spoke of the ascent of the spirit. The departure of the life force and its coming to be in God’s full control (in relation to the individual’s future life prospects), however, do not require a literal ascent. Likewise the descent of the spirit of animals into the earth is not to be regarded as a literal descent. It suggests, though, that animals have no hope of future life. (3:21)

In view of the inevitability of death, Koheleth “saw” or “recognized” that there was “nothing better [literally, “no good”] than for a man to rejoice in his works.” Since everything in the earthly realm is transitory, the worker, while he is alive, should derive wholesome pleasure from the results of his labor. This would mean finding delight in what he obtains from working — food, drink, and anything else that may appeal to the senses. This, according to Koheleth, is the worker’s “lot” or “portion.” (3:22)

When the individual dies, he ceases to have a share in the continuing cycle of mundane activities. Koheleth fittingly asked, “Who can bring him to see what will be after him?” Not a single member of the human family can do anything to enable the dead person to see or observe what is going on among people on earth. (3:22)

Ecclesiastes 4:1-16

4:1-12:8. The theme of the emptiness of life expanded

4:1-16. In view of the inequalities of life

5:1-7; 8:20. In view of religious insincerety and wealth

6:1-12. In view of men's end

7: 1-29. In view of man's sin

8:1-9:18. In view of man's uncertainties

10:1-20. In view of life's disorders

11:1-10. In view of youth

12:1-8. In view of old age

During the course of his investigation of human affairs, Koheleth initially appears to have given only passing notice to oppression. Later, however, as he said, "And I returned and saw all the oppression [literally, oppressions, suggesting many deeds and kinds of oppression] committed under the sun." Upon returning to, fixing his attention on, or reconsidering what seemingly had been the object of brief reflection, Koheleth saw or observed more closely the deeds of oppression taking place in the earthly realm beneath the sun. This careful reconsideration impressed on him just how widespread and distressing man's inhumanity to man really was. (4:1)

He continued, "And behold the tears of the oppressed, and they had no comforter. And their oppressors [had the] power, but they had no comforter." The oppressed shed many tears on account of their suffering. There was no relief for their deep inner pain. No one extended even a sympathetic word of comfort to them. Because the oppressors had the power or authority, the afflicted ones were at their mercy. The repetition of the thought that the oppressed had no comforter emphasizes their sad lot in life. (4:1)

In view of the sorrowful plight of the oppressed, Koheleth "pronounced" the dead "more fortunate" than the living. The Hebrew term *shavách* signifies to "pronounce fortunate," "praise," "commend," or "congratulate." Because the dead had entered the state where they could no longer suffer from oppression, Koheleth "congratulated" them, concluding that they were better off than the living. Only the living were still subject to oppression and its hurtful effects. (4:2)

From the standpoint of experiencing oppression, Koheleth reasoned that the one who is not yet in existence is better off than the living and than those who had lived in the past. This is because the one who is unborn has not “seen,” witnessed or experienced “the evil work that is done under the sun.” This “evil work” evidently refers to the bad deeds, including oppression, that may be observed in the realm of human affairs. (4:3)

Koheleth “saw” or took note of all the “labor” (exhausting or wearying toil) and all the “success of work” (the achievement from work, or the skill with which it is accomplished). In the Septuagint, the expression for “success of work” is “manliness [*andreía*] of work,” which could mean work done with a manly spirit or with fortitude. Based on his observation, Koheleth concluded that “it is the envy of a man toward his fellow.” This may signify that the “labor” and the “achievement” from or the “skillfulness” in work are (1) either prompted by or (2) make one the object of jealousy or envy. Both meanings of Koheleth’s words are found in translations. (4:4) “I have also noted that all labor and skillful enterprise come from men’s envy of each other.” (Tanakh) “I considered all toil and all achievement and saw that it springs from rivalry between one person and another.” (REB) “Then I saw all labor and every skilful work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbor.” (ASV) “And I have seen all the labour, and all the benefit of the work, because for it a man is the envy of his neighbor.” (Young)

Often the prime focus in working and doing a good job is not just a matter of getting the task performed. Workers may try to prove that they are better than others. They may call attention to themselves as being more efficient, faster, and able to perform work of superior quality. Consequently, competition and rivalry intensify, ill will develops, and severe judgments may be passed on others without any consideration being given to their limitations because of health, age, or level of experience. The joy that comes from mutual cooperation and a pleasant working relationship is lost. A job that formerly may have brought a measure of satisfaction becomes a source of daily irritation and frustration. (4:4)

Rightly, Koheleth said of this negative aspect associated with “labour” and “accomplishment” or skill, “This also [is] vanity” (emptiness, purposelessness, nothingness, or meaninglessness) and a “striving after wind,” a pursuit of something having no substance. (4:4; see the Notes section regarding verses 4, 6, and 16.)

Koheleth next focused on the opposite of diligent laboring when referring to the conduct of the “fool,” the person with a moral defect who has no desire to work. Instead of using his hands to accomplish something meaningful, he “folds his hands” in idle repose. If such a one can avoid doing what needs to be accomplished, he will. The fool’s laziness, however, exacts a high price. Regarding the indolent fool, Koheleth said, he “eats his own flesh.” The

inactivity is injurious to his physical and mental well-being. Because of his laziness, the fool does not have the means to procure nutritional food and other necessities. This leads to a breakdown in health and eventually to a premature death. Thus the lazy one consumes his own flesh, reducing his organism to an emaciated condition and, in time, to a lifeless corpse. (4:5)

Koheleth highlighted the right view of work. “Better is a palm [*kaph*] filled with rest than two fists [the dual form of *chóphen*] filled with labor and striving after wind.” (4:6; see the Notes section.)

The open hand or palm can hold more than one that is closed. Accordingly, a “palm filled with rest” suggests a fullness of rest. Such “rest” denotes one’s being able to enjoy the fruit of one’s work — food, drink, and various wholesome diversions. The implication is that the other hand is occupied in laboring, and so there is a balance between “toil” and “rest.” There is time for pleasurable activities that provide refreshment from the ordinary routine of working. A person having “a palm filled with rest” is content, free from the relentless, self-induced pressure to accumulate more and the worry that what is amassed will not be enough. Such a one also finds great happiness in assisting those in real need. (4:6)

An individual having “a palm filled with rest” is certainly much better off than one having two hands so completely occupied in toiling that there is no time for anything else. The reference to the fists being filled appears to indicate that the person is completely consumed by “laboring,” exhausting or wearying toil. As if tightly gripping the toil, the hands are unable to do anything else. Though driven by the inordinate desire to amass more and more, the individual who is totally consumed by his toiling gains nothing of lasting value. He has no time to enjoy anything and may shorten his life considerably by neglecting to care for his personal needs. In the end, he must leave all that he has accumulated behind. So, the hands were filled with labor and a struggling, grasping, or striving for what had no substance — wind. (4:6; see the Notes section regarding verses 4, 6, and 16.)

Koheleth then said, “And I returned and saw vanity under the sun.” As other vanities had already been enumerated, this was still another “vanity,” one that related to the pathetic situation of the miser. Earlier, Koheleth may have noticed the continual striving of the miser but later returned to what he had observed to make a more thorough investigation. He then saw or recognized that the miser’s activity “under the sun” (in the earthly realm beneath the sun) was “vanity,” emptiness, nothingness, futility, or purposelessness. It accomplished nothing of lasting value and really benefited no one. (4:7)

Describing the miser, Koheleth says, “There is one and not a second one,” that is, the individual is alone, having neither a friend nor a companion. Despite being without a family (having “no son or brother”), “there is no end to all his labor,” his hard, exhausting, or wearisome toil. Although there is no one with whom to share what he acquires from his laboring, he is not satisfied with the riches he accumulates. Because of his insatiable greed, his “eyes” want to behold more than what he possesses. (4:8)

Koheleth then represented this one as raising the question, “And for whom do I labor and deprive my soul from good?” The implied answer is, “No one.” Not even the miser is able to benefit from the fruit of his hard, exhausting, or wearisome toil. He deprives his “soul” (himself) from enjoying food, drink, and various wholesome diversions. He greedily clings to everything he has amassed, even begrudging to part with what he absolutely must in order to obtain life’s bare necessities. (4:8)

Koheleth concluded, “This also — vanity and an evil task.” The incessant striving of the miser is indeed “vanity,” emptiness, nothingness, purposelessness, or meaninglessness. It is an “evil,” a calamitous or a miserable “task,” business, or occupation. The miser’s life is one of perpetual gloom, as he finds it impossible to bring himself to use even a small part of what he has accumulated for personal enjoyment or to help those in genuine need. (4:8)

Against the backdrop of the miser’s miserable lot, Koheleth’s next words can be better appreciated, “Better two than one, because they have a good reward for their labor.” The good reward from laboring as a team is mutual assistance and protection. (4:9)

Koheleth continued, “For if they fall” (not at the same time but either one of them on different occasions), the companion is there to help the one who has fallen to get up. Whatever the nature of the fall might be (whether a literal fall while traveling over treacherous terrain or a disastrous plunge on account of unfavorable circumstances or poor judgment), a loyal companion will do what he can to aid his partner in distress. (4:10)

It is quite different with the person who labors alone, with no one to help him when he falls. Koheleth pronounced “woe” or calamity for the loner. Without a companion, the individual would have to deal with his misfortune without the aid, encouragement, or comfort that a companion could provide. He would experience the full brunt of the painful effects resulting from the fall. The situation could prove to be so serious that he would not be able to get up on his own, as would be the case when a severe injury resulted from a fall in treacherous terrain. (4:10)

Koheleth presented another example illustrating the value of having a companion. When traveling, individuals customarily slept outdoors during the night. Their outer garments served as blankets. A lone traveler would face the discomfort of the cold nights with very little to protect him. Therefore, Koheleth said, “If two lie down together,” they would be able to stay warm, benefiting from one another’s body heat. “But how can one be warm?” (4:11)

Similarly, a solitary traveler would be more vulnerable to attacks by robbers. (Compare Luke 10:30.) Faced with a robber, the unaccompanied traveler might easily be overpowered and left to die in a comparatively deserted area. As Koheleth observed, however, “two” would be able to withstand the assailant. (4:12)

Summing up the benefit of one’s having a companion, Koheleth appears to have quoted a proverbial saying, “A threefold cord is not quickly broken.” This illustrates that, when individuals have a common interest or objective, there is strength and benefit in numbers. A cord consisting of three strands may have been the strongest one made. A threefold cord would be much harder to tear apart than a cord consisting of one or two strands. (4:12)

Youth (when synonymous with inexperience) and poverty impose serious limitations. One’s having wisdom can offset these limitations. On the other hand, the benefits of age, experience, wealth and authority can be nullified by folly, the reckless disregard of what is right. Koheleth observed that a poor but wise “young man” is better off than an old but foolish king who no longer has the good sense to heed warnings or sound counsel, or who becomes so isolated that he does not even hear things to which he should be giving attention. (4:13)

Because of possessing wisdom, the poor youth may succeed in attaining what the old king is in danger of losing. By refusing to pay attention to sound advice (or not even hearing it), the old king could place the prosperity and security of the realm in jeopardy. As a result, he may perish in war, be removed from his position by a conqueror, die at the hand of an assassin, or be forced to abdicate by his own subjects. (4:13)

Regarding the wise youth, Koheleth continued, “For from the prison house, he goes forth to be king, although in his kingdom he had been born poor.” The mention of confinement might suggest that the old king came to view the youth as a threat and ordered his imprisonment. Something similar happened in the case of Solomon’s father David. Because King Saul began to regard him with suspicion, David eventually was forced to flee for his life and to live as an outlaw. (4:14; 1 Samuel 18:15, 25, 29; 19:2, 9-12; 20:30, 31; 22:8)

The wise youth, upon being released from prison, attains the kingship. This occurs despite his having been born a pauper in the kingdom where he begins to reign (or in the realm of the old monarch). “He had been born poor in the kingdom and had even gone to prison before becoming king.” (NCV) Based on a meaning other than “although” for the Hebrew conjunction *ki*, poverty and imprisonment have been represented as two different situations from which a successor might rise to the throne. “The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom.” (TNIV) The case of Joseph is a historical example of an elevation from prisoner to the second highest ruling position in Egypt. (4:14) Recognizing Joseph’s wisdom, Pharaoh declared: “Since God has made all this known to you, there is none so discerning and wise as you. You shall be in charge of my court, and by your command shall all my people be directed; only with respect to the throne shall I be superior to you.” (Genesis 41:39, 40, Tanakh)

Departing from the usual rendering of numerous modern translations, the Tanakh represents the Hebrew word for “poor” (*rush*) as a verb, “to become poor,” and makes the initial part of the verse apply to the youth and the concluding portion to the old king. This translation reads, “For the former can emerge from a dungeon to become king; while the latter, even if born to kingship, can become a pauper.” (4:14)

Koheleth continued, “I saw all the living who walk about under the sun with the second youth who will stand up in his place.” This observation applies to the living who conduct their daily affairs in the earthly realm beneath the sun. “All” probably refers to those giving their support to the “second youth” or “second young man.” The word “all” indicates that this successor enjoys popular backing. (4:15)

The expression “second youth” may mean second from the standpoint of being a replacement of the first, that is, of the old king. This is the meaning conveyed in the translation by James Moffatt: “I have seen all the living on earth side with such a youth, who was destined to reign instead of the old king.” It may be, however, that the “second young man” designates yet another successor. Besides adopting the application to another successor, *The Revised English Bible* represents the reference to “all the living” as a general statement of what Koheleth studiously observed among people on earth. “But I have studied all life here under the sun, and I saw his place taken by yet another young man.” (4:15)

Both the Hebrew text and the Septuagint, though, link “all the living” to the “second youth” by using a preposition meaning “with.” So it appears better to regard the verse as indicative of the popular support from contemporaries for either the immediate successor of the old king or yet another young man. If viewed as denoting another young man, the reference would point to the

people's disenchantment with the old king and then also with his immediate successor. (4:15)

Koheleth continued, "No end to all the people, to all who were before them." The words "no end to all the people" are commonly understood as meaning "multitudes" or "unlimited numbers" of people. "Before them" (literally, "before their faces") could mean that multitudes preceded the old king and his successor (or successors) and, therefore, had no knowledge of them. Another possibility is that the pronoun "them" designates the generations that lived before "all the people" of the then-existing generation. Later, in this verse, the reference is to "him," the successor to the throne. (4:16) A number of translators have rendered the text to apply to the successor only. "There was no end to all those people whom he led. (NRSV) "He takes his place at the head of innumerable subjects." (NJB)

Koheleth added that those who would be coming later would not "rejoice in him." Initially, the young man is highly favored, enjoying the backing of the masses. Eventually this ends, as someone else captures the fancy of the people who later dominate the earthly scene. There is no further pleasure or delight in the gifted youth whose reign had been hailed with great enthusiasm. This development could be viewed as occurring either during the ruler's lifetime or afterward. Later generations would, of course, have no pleasure in the gifted youth who is unknown to them. (4:16)

Accordingly, even the topmost position procures no lasting benefit for the one attaining it. Fame and popularity are fleeting. Koheleth concluded that this is indeed "vanity and a striving after wind." In view of the temporary nature of the honor enjoyed, kingship is emptiness, nothingness, or meaninglessness, and a pursuit of wind, something lacking real substance. (4:16; see the Notes section.)

Notes:

The Hebrew word *rúach* and its Greek equivalent *pneúma* can mean either "wind" or "spirit." Instead of "striving after wind" or a similar expression (in verses 4, 6, 16), a number of translations read "vexation of spirit" (KJV, Young). In its rendering of the Septuagint, a new English translation (NETS) uses the expression "preference of spirit," whereas *The Orthodox Study Bible* says "choice of one's spirit." A German translation of the Septuagint (*Septuaginta Deutsch*), however, reads "striving after wind" (*Streben nach Wind*). The Greek term rendered "preference," "choice," or "striving" is *proáiresis* and can also signify "commitment." Persons who have committed themselves to, chosen, or preferred something that is mere wind could be spoken of as striving after wind.

In verse 6, the Hebrew word *kaph* refers to the flat of the hand or the palm, and the term *chóphen* can designate the hollow of the hand and so could apply to the hand when formed into a fist in order to keep hold of something. “Fists” (*Fäuste*) is the rendering found in the revised German *Elberfelder Bibel* and Schlachter’s German translation. In the Septuagint, the word *dráx*, (the open hand or palm) translates both Hebrew words.

Verse 17 in numerous Bible translations is verse 1 of chapter 5 in others. In this commentary, the verse will be considered in the next chapter.

Ecclesiastes 5:1-20

Koheleth cautioned, “Guard your feet when you go to the house of God.” To guard the feet signifies to give careful heed to where one is going, not acting in haste or carelessly and without due deliberation. The “house of God” designates the temple, for it was only there that acceptable sacrifices could be offered. (Deuteronomy 12:5, 6; 2 Chronicles 7:12) Being the “house of God,” the temple was a holy place, requiring that worshipers “draw near” or make their approach for the right reason and with the proper reverential attitude. (5:1 [4:17])

One’s objective for drawing near should have been “to hear,” a sincere desire to respond obediently to divine commands. The Hebrew expression “to hear” often denotes “to obey.” This is reflected in renderings such as “draw near in obedience.” (5:1 [4:17]; HCSB, REB)

Koheleth contrasted the motivation of obedience with the sacrificing of “fools.” Such persons are not lacking in mental perception. Theirs is a serious moral flaw. They manifest a reckless disregard for what is right, having no appreciation for sacred things. Their sacrificing would have been merely the fulfillment of a perfunctory religious duty. It may also have been undertaken to impress others with their piety. (5:1 [4:17])

Koheleth added that the “fools” or morally corrupt persons do not “know” or recognize that “they are doing evil” or wrong. The “evil” may refer to their offering sacrifices with impure motives and as defiled persons. (5:1 [4:17]) A similar thought is expressed at Proverbs 21:27. “The sacrifice of the wicked is abhorrent, above all if it is offered for bad motives.” (NJB) “The sacrifice of the wicked man is an abomination, the more so as he offers it in depravity.” (Tanakh)

The Hebrew text may also be understood as meaning that such persons only know how to do bad. So, after sacrificing, they resumed their evil practices. They did not make any heartfelt acknowledgment of sin and put forth efforts to change their ways. As long as they were observing the ritualistic aspects of

worship, they considered their conduct acceptable. (5:1 [4:17]; compare Isaiah 1:11-17.)

Prayerful expressions, too, require careful attention. Haste and thoughtlessness are out of place. Koheleth counseled, “Do not be hasty with your mouth; do not let your heart be impetuous to utter a word before the face of God, for God [is] in heaven and you [are] on earth. Therefore, let your words be few.” Promises made to the Supreme Sovereign should not be made rashly but should be preceded by serious deliberation. The “heart,” the deep inner self, should not be permitted to prompt impulsive or rash words before God. A proper recognition of his greatness should serve to restrain one from making rash expressions. (5:2[1])

The Almighty resides in the highest heavens and is elevated far above earth’s residents, calling for humility on their part. This makes it inappropriate for anyone to ramble on thoughtlessly when addressing the Most High. One’s words should be “few,” that is, they should be sincere, meaningful expressions that reflect reverential regard for God’s majesty and dignity. (5:2[1]) Jesus Christ gave similar admonition, “In your prayers do not go babbling on like the heathen, who imagine that the more they say the more likely they are to be heard.” (Matthew 6:7, REB)

Koheleth reinforced his point about “few” words by introducing a proverbial saying, “For the dream comes with much preoccupation; and the fool’s voice through many words.” When, during the course of the day, the mind is occupied by worries and distracting thoughts about many tasks, this can lead to restless nights and disturbing dreams — nightmares. Undue preoccupation with materialistic goals may also occasion vain daydreaming about future successes. (Compare James 4:13-16.) Similarly, continual chatter inevitably results in voicing foolish or unbecoming thoughts. When thoughtless and injurious words continue to pass the lips, the speaker reveals himself to be a fool, a person with a moral defect. (5:3[2])

Rash or thoughtless speaking is especially serious in matters pertaining to God. Koheleth continued, “When you vow a vow to God, do not delay in paying it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you vow.” (5:4[3])

A vow is a solemn promise voluntarily made to God that one will do something of a nonobligatory nature or refrain from doing something that in itself would be proper. Vows were often made in conjunction with appeals for God’s blessing upon a serious undertaking, for a special gift from him, or for deliverance from a grave danger. (5:4[3])

God's favorable response to the appeal would require that the vow be fulfilled without hesitation. A failure to act in harmony with the vow revealed a person to be a fool, one with a moral defect by reason of his proving false to God as respects his promise. The Almighty would have no pleasure or delight in such a one. The obligation to fulfill the vow was to be taken seriously. Rightly, then, Koheleth expressed the point about fulfilling a vow as a command. (5:4[3])

The making of a vow was completely voluntary, and there was no sin in refraining from making such a solemn promise. Koheleth, therefore, added, "It is better that you do not vow than that you vow and do not pay." Before making a vow, the individual should give serious consideration to his being able to keep his solemn promise. Whenever the possibility of failure to perform a vow existed, the better course would have been to avoid placing oneself under solemn obligation. (5:5[4])

Further emphasizing the seriousness of nonfulfillment, Koheleth said, "Do not let your mouth cause your flesh to sin, and do not say before the face of the messenger that it [was] a mistake ['ignorance,' LXX]. For why should God be angry at your voice and destroy the work of your hands?" (5:6[5])

Whereas the vow is made with the mouth, the "flesh" or the fleshly organism (the individual) comes under obligation to fulfill the solemn promise. Accordingly, a person's failure to discharge the vow signified that his mouth had caused him to sin. In its basic sense, the Hebrew word (*chatá'*) meaning "to sin" denotes "to miss" (as when an archer misses the target). Hence, sin is a deviation from the right course, a failure to do what is required. (5:6[5])

After making a rash vow, the individual may have second thoughts. He may realize that he made a mistake. The circumstances may be such that he cannot discharge his thoughtless vow, forcing him to tell the "messenger" that it was a mistake. (5:6[5])

The Hebrew word *mal'akh* means "messenger" and could designate either a heavenly messenger (an angel) or an earthly one. Malachi 2:7 refers to the Aaronic priest as "the messenger of YHWH." So also here, in Ecclesiastes, the reference could be to the priest who accepted what was vowed. Some have suggested that the "messenger" was a temple official who made a record of vows and, at the time for the fulfillment thereof, accepted what had been solemnly promised. "Do not protest to the temple messenger, 'My vow was a mistake.'" (NIV) There is, however, no scriptural reference to such a temple official. (5:6[5])

The Septuagint reads "God" instead of "messenger" or "angel." Therefore, it appears preferable to regard the reference as being to God or to the specific

angel who is revealed as having the most intimate position with the Almighty. This one is the “angel of YHWH,” the direct representative of the Most High. Because of the special relationship existing between this angel and YHWH, words directed to God would also be spoken before this angel. (5:6[5]; compare Exodus 3:2-4.)

Failure to discharge the vow would result in God’s displeasure. There would certainly be no good reason for anyone to make a rash vow, resulting in becoming a recipient of divine anger for failure to keep the thoughtless promise. (5:6[5])

The words “do not say ... that it was a mistake” could be regarded as meaning that the individual would lightly dismiss the failure to discharge the vow, viewing the making of such a mistake as merely an act of ignorance. God’s anger may then be in response to the invalid excuses offered to avoid what had been solemnly, though thoughtlessly, promised. (5:6[5])

The divine favor and blessing that may have been experienced before the time came for fulfilling the vow would not continue. Without God’s favor and blessing, the works of one failing to discharge a vow would come to nothing. (5:6[5]) As the psalmist expressed the matter, “If YHWH does not build the house, the builders labor on it in vain. If YHWH does not guard the city, the watchman watches in vain.” (Psalm 127:1)

Koheleth’s admonition about rash speaking concludes with the words, “For in the abundance of dreams, also vanities and words abound, but fear God.” This suggests that the dreams can give rise to what is vain, empty or meaningless and to thoughtless words. Dreams occurring during sleep do not have this result. Therefore, the dreams may designate imaginings or fantasies relating to the attainment of selfish, materialistic goals. Such “dreams” are vain or empty, producing nothing of a lasting and truly beneficial nature. As such empty dreams increase, this leads to a corresponding increase of vanities. Thoughtless words, including rash vows, may likewise increase. When there is unrealistic, empty dreaming, what is said has no real substance. Empty promises may be made to God in attempts to gain his favor and blessing for selfish pursuits. One’s fearing God, having the proper reverential regard for him, would deter one from making rash vows and other thoughtless expressions. (5:7[6])

Because of difficulty in seeing how dreams, vanities, and words are related, numerous translators have emended the passage. “A profusion of dreams and a profusion of words are futile. Therefore fear God.” (REB) “Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God.” (NIV) “From too many delusions come futility and too much talk.” (NJB) A footnote in the Tanakh reads, “Meaning of verse uncertain. Emendation yields ‘Much brooding

results in dreams; and much talk in futilities.”” None of such changes have the support of the Septuagint, which reads, “because in the multitude of dreams, also vanities and many words.” For this reason, it would appear preferable to adhere to the word order of the Hebrew text, as does the Septuagint. (5:7[6])

At this point, Koheleth introduced a different subject, one relating to a serious flaw in governmental administration. He said, “If you see the oppression of the poor and the wresting of justice and righteousness in a province, do not be astounded about the matter. For a high one over a high one is watching, and higher ones [are] over them.” (5:8[7])

Some have understood the reference to the highest level to be to God, the “Supreme One.” Koheleth’s words, though, relate to a “province” or a region under a specific governmental administration. Whereas God does observe what takes place in the earthly realm, his rulership has nothing in common with any oppressive system. His law to Israel specifically prohibited mistreatment of the lowly. (Exodus 23:6; Leviticus 19:15) He does not countenance injustice and will call all oppressors to account. (Lamentations 3:34-36) Reasonably, therefore, God’s watching would not be part of an explanation about not being surprised about oppression of the poor. (5:8[7])

Koheleth’s next words have been variously understood. A literal reading of the Hebrew text is, “And the profit of the earth — for all it [is]; a king by a field is served.” “All” may be understood as referring to people. What the earth or land produces is indeed for all persons, including those in high station. Even the king is served by the field, that is, by the yield from the cultivated land. The words of Koheleth may serve as a warning to corrupt officials. Since they are dependent on the land for their food, they are working against their own interests by oppressing the lowly who labor in the fields. (5:9[8])

Such an implied warning is more specifically expressed when the Hebrew text is rendered, “A king for a field is in servitude.” Taking the Hebrew *‘avádh* to signify being “subject” or in “servitude” has the support of the Chaldee paraphrase, which reads, “And the great advantage of cultivating the land is above all, [for] when the subjects of a country revolt, and the king flees from them into the country, if he has nothing to eat, this very king becomes subject to a labourer in the field.” (Ginsburg’s translation) Although this paraphrase reads much more into the passage than the Hebrew text warrants and relates the “all” to the superiority of the advantage (“above all”), it adds support to the understanding that the king depends on what the field produces and, therefore, on those engaged in cultivating it. “The increase from the land is taken by all; the king himself profits from the fields.” (NIV) Taxes on the land and crops provided funds for the royal projects, and part of the produce of the land served

as food for the royal household. “And since the king is the highest official, he benefits most from the taxes paid on the land.” (5:9[8], CEV)

George Lamsa’s translation of the Syriac presents the thought of the king’s being “served by the field” but adds what this requires of him to be thus served. “Moreover the riches of the earth are for all; the king, himself, is served by cultivating his own field.” Since land will not produce of its own accord, the king must see to it that the field is cultivated. Without the essential plowing and sowing of seed, there is no harvest and, hence, no food for the royal household. (5:9[8])

Numerous translations express a completely different meaning, placing the emphasis on the “profit,” advantage, or benefit of having a king. “Yet an advantage for a country in every respect is a king for the arable land.” (NAB) “But all things considered, this is an advantage for a land: a king for a plowed field.” (NRSV) Renderings that represent the king as an advantage for the land do not really depart from the Hebrew text. While preserving the word order of the Hebrew text, the words themselves can be arranged into one sentence that focuses on the value of a king. A literal reading would be, “And the advantage of the earth — for all of it — [is] a king for the cultivated land.” The term “all” (*kol*) could be taken to refer to the “earth,” the country, or the land, and the Hebrew expression for “to serve” (*‘a-vádh*) also means “to work,” “to labor,” or “to till.” Rendering the expression as “tilled” or “cultivated” has the support of the Septuagint, which uses the word *ergázomai* (“to work,” “to labor,” “to till”) and reads, “And the abundance of the earth in all [or, ‘everything’] is, a king of the tilled field.” A footnote in the German translation of the Septuagint (*Septuaginta Deutsch*) provides the following explanation for the phrase (“a king for the cultivated field”), “a king to whom the cultivated field belongs [*ein König, dem das bebaute Feld gehört*].” (5:9[8])

If the focus of the Hebrew text is indeed the king, the meaning could be that a country profits by having a ruler who looks after the security of his domain, making it possible for agricultural operations to continue unhindered. Because the Scriptures present the introduction of the monarchy in a very negative light, however, it seems questionable that this would be the meaning of Koheleth’s words. (1 Samuel 8:5–20; 12:12–19) It appears preferable to regard them as signifying that even the monarch cannot survive without harvests from the cultivated field. Despite his high position, he is dependent on the lowly agricultural laborers. (5:9[8])

Possibly the insatiable greed of oppressive officials suggested to Koheleth the thought he next expressed, “a lover of silver will not be satisfied with silver, nor a lover of yield with abundance. This also [is] vanity.” The Septuagint renders the words about a “lover of yield” as a question, “And who loved yield in their

abundance?” This could be understood to mean, Who does not love to have a bounteous yield? (5:10[9])

Anciently, silver was a common medium of exchange and, therefore, also a measure of wealth. Since coinage did not have its start until about 700 B.C.E., the silver was weighed out when making purchases. Accordingly, “silver” is synonymous with “money,” and the Hebrew term is so rendered in many modern translations. (5:10[9])

The person who loves silver (or money), whose consuming desire is to have as much of it as possible, never comes to the point where he is satisfied with what he has. Although he may possess more than he could possibly use to obtain what he needs and wants, he will strive to accumulate more money. Regardless of how great the increase is, he will never consider it to be enough. Because of his insatiable greed, the abundance is, in effect, perceived as poverty. This dissatisfaction, coupled with the relentless striving for more, is “vanity,” emptiness, meaninglessness, or purposelessness. It is a senseless struggle for wealth that will not be put to any beneficial use and, in the end, proves to be a temporary possession. (5:10[9])

When the “good” (the “wealth”) increases, those who eat it increase. The individual who owned much land, large herds and flocks, and other possessions could not care for everything by himself. To attend to his vast holdings, he needed servants and hirelings. The greater his wealth, the greater would have been the number of laborers needed. These laborers proved to be consumers of some of the wealth. Slaves or servants had to be provided with food, clothing, and shelter. Hirelings had to be paid wages. The wealthy owner could not benefit personally from all that he possessed. The amount that he could eat and drink was limited, and he could only wear enough clothing to be comfortable. Summing up the person’s sole reward in question form, Koheleth said, “What advantage is it to the owner [[‘owners,’ likely a plural of excellence that conveys the grandeur of the wealthy man] but to see it with his eyes?” The only “advantage,” profit, or benefit for the individual would be his being able to survey all that he owned and proudly proclaim that it belonged to him. Even this empty advantage was diminished in the case of a greedy man who resented having to part with some of his possessions to support servants and hirelings. (5:11[10])

Instead of a word meaning “advantage,” “benefit,” or “gain,” the Septuagint has a term meaning “manliness” or “courage” (*andreía*). Perhaps the question then could be understood to mean, What real strength does an abundance of possessions provide, except for their possessor to see them with his eyes? (5:11[10])

An individual's wealth may deprive him of what the lowly laborer enjoys. Koheleth observed, "Sweet [is] the sleep of a laborer [literally, 'one serving'; LXX, *doúlos*, 'servant,' or 'slave'], whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man will not permit him no sleep." The tired laborer is able to lie down at the close of the day to enjoy a peaceful night's rest. His sleep is "sweet" or "pleasurable," not disrupted by worrying or fretting about many possessions. Whether he eats little or a goodly portion, he is still able to benefit from the refreshment of a good night's rest. The rich man, however, worries about his possessions and his undertakings to increase his wealth. His thoughts race from one concern to another, putting him in a state of mental agitation that is destructive to restful sleep. (5:12[11])

Life's uncertainties may be yet another source for a wealthy person's great distress. Koheleth noted, "There is a grievous evil I have seen under the sun: riches being kept for their owner to his evil." "Under the sun," in the earthly realm beneath that celestial orb, Koheleth "saw" or observed a great misfortune. (5:13[12])

This "evil," misfortune, or calamity was the accumulation of riches to the individual's own "evil," hurt, or injury. Consumed by the desire to increase in wealth, the "owner" may have deprived himself of the usual comforts and pleasures of life, filling his days with incessant toiling and anxiety about maintaining and adding to his riches. Thus he destroyed the quality of his life, sacrificing all personal enjoyment from the product of his labor and darkening his days by continual worry. (5:13[12])

Koheleth added that the "riches perished by an evil occupation." This "evil occupation" could refer to some business venture that was designed to increase wealth but failed, resulting in the loss of everything. Acquiring wealth through trade involved considerable risk and danger. Caravans were often beset upon by robbers, and ships laden with valuable cargo could be wrecked during storms. It would not have been uncommon for individuals thus to lose great wealth. (5:14[13])

After having expended much time and energy in amassing riches that were suddenly lost and from which no benefit had been derived, the man fathered a son. Therefore, not even the heir could get any enjoyment from what had been accumulated, there being "nothing" in the father's "hand." In an impoverished state, the father had the additional burden of caring for a son. (5:14[13])

People who are addicted to the amassing of riches find it very difficult to part with even a small portion of what they have accumulated. Usually, sheer necessity and social pressure are the only factors that force them to spend the least amount possible. This must make the eventuality of their having to part

with everything at death particularly painful and disturbing to them. They simply cannot escape the reality of what Koheleth set out, “As he came naked from his mother’s womb, he will again go as he came. And he will take nothing from his labor that he may carry away in his hand.” (5:15[14])

A similar thought is expressed in Job 1:21 (Tanakh), “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there.” Both the words of Koheleth and those in the book of Job appear to designate the “earth” as “mother.” This is evidently because the first man was formed from earth’s elements. Moreover, at death there is no return to the literal womb of the mother. Man does, however, return to the elements of the earth. Not even one product of his labor can a man then carry away with him. Though the riches amassed may have been extensive, not even a mere handful can be taken as a lasting possession. The individual has lost control over everything. In the naked state he came into existence, and in that same state he must return to the lifeless dust. (5:15[14])

Commenting further about this aspect, Koheleth continued, “And this also [is] a grievous evil, Just as he came, so will he go. And what profit has he from having labored for the wind?” At death, all the toil will mean nothing. The one who amassed much has no advantage over the one who has nothing. The painful “evil” or “misfortune” is that the greedy toiler departs in the same manner that he entered the earthly scene, with nothing. (5:16[15])

The answer to the question about what “profit,” advantage, or benefit results to the one who toils for wind is, “None.” The hoarder of riches has truly labored for “wind,” something that lacks substance. As death approached, he was forced to realize that all must be left behind. The individual even lacked the satisfaction of having enjoyed his days and contributed to the happiness of others by having shared generously from his possessions. (5:16[15])

Koheleth depicted the gloomy existence of the miserly hoarder, saying: “Also all his days he eats in darkness and [has] much sorrow, and his sickness and anger.” There would be nothing to brighten the days of such a person. Driven to amass more and more, he would labour from early morning till late at night. He seemingly begrudged having to eat, as this required spending a little from what had been amassed. When eating, likely late at night, he would do so with a gloomy spirit and possibly in the dark. His self-denial may have gone to the extreme point of feeling that he could not afford to use the small amount of olive oil needed to light a lamp. Thus, the time for enjoyment of food and drink would be turned into an occasion of “sorrow” or “vexation.” The Hebrew term *ká‘as* can mean “to sorrow,” “to be grieved,” or “to be vexed” or “angry.” In the Septuagint, the corresponding Greek word (*pénthos*) denotes “sorrow” or “mourning.” (5:17[16])

The mental outlook of the person described by Koheleth was sick, and the individual's extreme self-denial may have contributed to physical illness. His anger may have been prompted by whatever interfered with the accumulation of riches. (5:17[16])

In the Septuagint, no mention is made of eating. The entire description focuses on the gloomy aspect of such a person's life. "And indeed all his days [are spent] in darkness and sorrow, and much anger and sickness and bitterness." To an extent, this reading is also followed by a number of modern translators. (5:17[16]) "What is more, all his days are overshadowed; gnawing anxiety and great vexation are his lot, sickness and resentment." (REB) "All the days of his life are passed in gloom and sorrow, under great vexation, sickness and wrath." (NAB)

Having discussed the emptiness of pursuing wealth, coupled with extreme self-denial, Koheleth called attention to the proper view of toiling and the means obtained thereby. Based on his careful observation, he said, "Look! What I have seen [that is] good, which [is] beautiful, [is for a man] to eat and to drink and to see good from all his labor that he labors under the sun for the number of the days of his life that God has given him, for this [is] his portion." (5:18[17])

What Koheleth "saw" or recognized as "good," desirable, or pleasant, he also described as "beautiful," appropriate, or right (*yaphéh*). This is the sense the rendering of the Septuagint conveys, "good, which is beautiful [*kálos*, also meaning 'fine,' 'fitting,' 'advantageous']." (5:18[17])

This "good" or "desirable" thing is for a man to enjoy the products or results from his labor. To be able to obtain food and drink, the individual has to work. Times for eating and drinking should be happy occasions and, therefore, part of the pleasant reward from laboring. The worker should "see" or "experience" "good from all his labor," his wearisome or exhausting toil. This could refer to finding satisfaction in the achievements from laboring and the means obtained thereby — means that could be used to acquire what contributes to the enjoyment of life. (5:18[17])

Such "good," pleasure, or satisfaction is to be enjoyed from all the labor engaged in during a man's life under the sun, on earth beneath the sun on which humans depend for light and warmth. Since life itself is the Creator's gift, Koheleth rightly noted that "the number of the days of [a man's] life" are given to him by God. The enjoyment of these days of life — the fruit from labor — is man's "portion" or "lot." (5:18[17])

Whatever the Most High permits is attributed to him. Accordingly, Koheleth referred to "every man to whom God has given wealth and treasures." The

combination of the Hebrew terms for “wealth” and “treasures” may serve to emphasize that the possessions are many and varied. (5:19[18])

Regarding a man who has been “given wealth and treasures,” Koheleth also said that God gives him “power to eat of it and to take his portion and to rejoice in his labor.” This implies that the individual would recognize that he, only by reason of divine permission, owns what he does. His sentiments would be like those expressed by Job, “YHWH gave.” (Job 1:21) Consequently, he would possess the wisdom to make good use of his riches to benefit himself and others, avoiding the pitfalls of extreme self-denial and selfish, miserly hoarding. Thus God would have empowered him to “eat” or “partake” from what is owned. Such “eating” or “partaking” may be understood to signify deriving proper enjoyment from the “wealth and treasures.” (5:19[18])

The “portion” apparently refers to the individual’s lot in life. Being empowered by God “to take” this “portion” may denote “to accept” it as coming from him and, hence, to be content. So the person would shun the greedy amassing of riches that is characteristic of those who are dissatisfied even with abundance. (5:19[18])

The individual is also empowered to “rejoice in his labor.” As elsewhere in Ecclesiastes, labor is not the goal in itself, for it is wearisome and exhausting. Rather, labor can lead to a feeling of satisfaction with what is accomplished or furnishes the means for whatever contributes to joy, delight, or wholesome pleasure. The “gift of God” is the capacity to enjoy the fruit from labor. (5:19[18])

The person whom God has thus empowered maintains a cheerful outlook. Koheleth observed, “For he will not much remember the days of his life, because God answers in the joy of his heart.” (5:20[19])

The remembering would be a recalling of the negative aspects of life, a brooding over its shortness, uncertainties, and problems. Thoughts about such matters are not dominant in the case of the one whom Koheleth described. While the individual would not be oblivious respecting negative aspects, these would not be a source of continual disturbance. Only infrequently would such “remembering” or “recalling” occur. (5:20[19])

Instead, the individual would have joy of heart, that is, he would have joy in his deep inner self. He would be content with his lot in life. Koheleth introduced the thought about joy with the words, “because God answers [‘*anáh*].” When adding the word “him” after the verb “answers,” the meaning would be that God grants joy to the person making the request. Without the addition, the words could be understood to mean that God assents, concurs, or is in agreement with the

individual's joy of heart. This would indicate that it is a joy the Almighty approves. It is genuine, affecting the "heart," the deep inner self. (5:20[19])

In the Septuagint, the Hebrew word *'anáh* is rendered *perispáo*, meaning "occupy," "divert," or "distract." This is also the thought conveyed in many modern translations. "God lets him busy himself with the joy of his heart." (NAB) "God fills his time with joy of heart." (REB) "God keeps them occupied with the joy of their hearts." (NRSV) "God keeps him busy enjoying himself." (Tanakh) Accordingly, because the joy of the heart, the deep inner self, is dominant, few are the occasions when disturbing or painful thoughts intrude. This blessing is attributed to God. (5:20[19])

Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

Koheleth "saw" or observed an "evil," a calamity, or a misfortune "under the sun," that is, on earth, with particular reference to the realm of human affairs. He described this "evil" as "great [*rav*] upon man." (6:1)

The Hebrew term *rav* denotes "great," "large," "numerous," "much," or "abundant," and the corresponding Greek word *polýs* (LXX) basically has the same significance. Because the Hebrew expression is broad in meaning, translations vary in their renderings. The word may be understood to signify great in degree and, therefore, something that "weighs heavily upon" those who must bear it or, by extension, something that is "grave" or "serious." This term could also mean great in number and, hence, something that is "common" or "frequent." Modern translations generally show preference for a rendering that emphasizes degree, and this appears to preserve the thought of the Hebrew "great upon" better than a rendering that focuses on number. Additionally, what follows reveals that the situation involves a man who possesses riches, wealth, and honor. This has always been descriptive of the few, not the majority, and so would not usually be regarded as a frequent or common occurrence. (6:1)

Having mentioned the "evil" he had "seen," Koheleth proceeded to provide the details, "a man to whom God has given wealth and treasures and honor, so that he is not lacking in anything for his soul in all that he desires." The word "man" in this case is not *'adhám* ("earthling"), but *'ish*, which at times signifies a man of high rank or station. This would fit the context, as the man has wealth, treasures, and honor. As in Ecclesiastes 5:18(19), the use of the Hebrew terms for "wealth" and "treasures" may serve to show that the man owns much property and a great variety of possessions. The Hebrew word for "honor" is *kavóh**dh*, which in a literal sense means "heaviness" and, figuratively, describes one who amounts to something or who enjoys a position of distinction and is accorded respect. By virtue of divine permission, the man has an abundance and

is also esteemed. That is why Koheleth spoke of the wealth, treasures, and honor as having been “given” by God. (6:2)

From the standpoint of wealth and position, the man has everything. He lacks nothing for “his soul,” or “for himself,” that he might desire or crave. Expressed in modern idiom, he has or is able to obtain anything that money can buy. (6:2)

Nevertheless, his situation is tragic or lamentable. Koheleth continued, “God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreign man eats it — this [is] vanity, and it is an evil affliction.” (6:2)

The Hebrew word for “to eat” apparently is used in a figurative sense and signifies “to enjoy.” By saying that God does not enable him to “eat of” or “enjoy” what he has, Koheleth appears to suggest that the man’s situation is the result of circumstances beyond his control. Factors that would prevent enjoyment could be depression, serious illness, crippling disability, or heavy demands imposed by wealth and position — anything that could rob one of the time or the capacity to engage in enjoyable, refreshing activities. (6:2)

Adding to the man’s pain is the fact that a stranger or foreigner, someone not even distantly related, is able to enjoy what he cannot. The case of Abraham (Abram), while childless, illustrates one aspect of this situation. When assured by Almighty God that his reward would be very great, Abraham replied, “What can you give me, seeing that I am childless? The heir to my household is Eliezer of Damascus. You have given me no children, and so my heir must be a slave born in my house.” (Genesis 15:2, 3, REB) Circumstances other than childlessness that could lead to a foreigner’s getting the benefit include loss through war, robbery, fraud, or unjust seizure by official decree. (1 Kings 21:7-16) In view of the focus on children in the next verse, Koheleth may have had childlessness in mind as the circumstance that would allow a foreigner to derive the enjoyment. (6:2)

When there is no enjoyment from wealth and position, when a foreigner benefits instead, life seems vain, empty, meaningless, or purposeless. As Koheleth expressed it, “this is vanity, and it is an evil affliction.” The Hebrew expression for “evil affliction,” “disease,” or “illness” evidently should be understood in a general sense as something very painful. This significance is conveyed by the renderings of many translations — “grievous ill” (NRSV), “dire affliction” (REB), “dire plague” (NAB), and “grievous suffering” (NJB). (6:2)

Whereas a man’s not having an heir was regarded as very distressing, Koheleth next indicated that having children and attaining to advanced age (both of which were regarded as blessings from God) do not necessarily result in a purposeful life. Koheleth observed, “If a man fathers a hundred [children], and lives many

years, and the days of his years are many, and his soul is not satisfied with the good, and also [there] is no burial for him; I say, a stillborn [is] better off than he.” (6:3)

Although a polygamous man might have been able to father a hundred children by his many wives (Judges 8:30; 10:4; 12:9, 14), the expression “hundred” apparently is here not to be taken literally. It simply is a large round number that denotes “many.” (6:3)

The repetitious words “lives many years” and “days of his years are many” seem to suggest that, though the life is long, one day after another passes slowly, dragging on day in and day out, year after year. This would contrast with the man described earlier, the one who does not “much remember the days of his life” (5:19[20]), and so may also be understood as implying that the days are filled with distress, worries, and problems. The man’s life is filled with unpleasant days year after year. (6:3) His situation is like that described by Job, “Why is life given to those who find it so bitter? They long for death but it does not come, they seek it more eagerly than hidden treasure.” (Job 3:20, 21, REB)

As in the previous verse, “soul” means the man himself. He is not filled or satisfied with “the good,” evidently what Koheleth had earlier identified as “the good” — the enjoyment of the fruit from labor. (5:17[18]) Since the man experiences no real joy, his long life means that he faces more problems, frustrations, and difficulties over a longer period of time than does one whose life span is short. (6:3)

The reference to “no burial” may mean that, even when the long life of misery ends, the man is deprived of a proper or honourable burial. Thus to die unlamented was regarded as a terrible calamity. (Jeremiah 9:22; 14:16; 25:32, 33) The comment about “no burial” may also signify that, on account of his wretched life, he longs for the grave and, still, his miserable existence continues. (6:3; compare Job 3:22.)

Viewed from the standpoint of an empty life filled with distress and hardship, a stillborn baby, as Koheleth noted, is better off than the man whom he described. Unlike such a man, the stillborn escapes all misery. (6:3)

Without life, even a fully formed baby can do absolutely nothing. Lifelessness or nonexistence is the utmost “emptiness,” “vanity,” or “nothingness.” As Koheleth said regarding the stillborn baby, “in vanity it enters.” Since there is no independent existence for it outside the womb, the stillborn’s entrance into the world is purposeless or futile. (6:4)

Not even for a moment does a stillborn baby experience the light of life. As it enters the world outside the womb in a state of nonexistence, so it immediately departs in the darkness of that lifeless condition. The stillborn baby has no opportunity to make a name or reputation for itself. So it really has no name. As Koheleth expressed it, “and in darkness its name is covered.” The stillborn’s name is forever hidden in the pitch blackness of its nonexistence. (6:4)

Life on earth is dependent upon the sun. Without its light and warmth, humankind could not survive. Thus, “to see” the sun means to be alive, to experience life in the earthly realm beneath that celestial orb. The stillborn baby, however, “has not seen the sun.” Its eyes never caught even a brief glimpse of this orb. At no time did the stillborn feel the sun’s warmth. The reference to “not knowing” could either mean that the stillborn baby had not known the sun or had not known anything. Both aspects would be true, for the stillborn had no sensation of anything associated with earthly life. It therefore also escaped the wearisome, exhausting or painful toil of the living, and the sufferings, hardships, and frustrations that are an integral part of human existence. Accordingly, Koheleth concluded that, unlike the long-lived father of many children who derived no enjoyment from his labor, the stillborn does have “rest.” (6:5)

An extraordinarily long life — usually viewed as a blessing — would not improve the man’s lot. Koheleth, when referring to a man who might live “one thousand years twice over” and did not “see good,” raised the question, “Do not all go to one place?” Without “seeing good,” without experiencing enjoyment from the fruit of his labor, a man whose life was more than twice as long as that of Methuselah (Genesis 5:27) would not be better off than the stillborn. His long life would prove to be one of prolonged misery and agony. At death, he would go to the same place as all others do — the realm of the dead. Unlike the stillborn which arrives in that realm without a moment’s delay, the long-lived man eventually gets there in a far more painful manner. He must first endure a wretched life of exhausting and wearisome toil. Only in the grave would he finally have the complete rest that had eluded him throughout his long, unpleasant life. (6:6) “There the wicked cease from troubling, there the weary are at rest. There the captives are at ease together, and hear not the voice of the slave driver. Small and great are there the same, and the servant is free from his master.” (Job 3:17-19, NAB)

To continue living, a person must eat and drink. Humans must work to be able to obtain the food and the liquids that get into the body through the mouth. Koheleth observed, “All man’s labor [is] for his mouth.” (6:7) A similar thought is expressed in Proverbs 16:26 (NAB), “The laborer’s appetite labors for him, for his mouth urges him on.”

Whereas much of life is spent in laboring to be able to procure necessities, complete satisfaction is elusive, unattainable. Koheleth continued, “and yet the soul is not filled.” The “soul” evidently is here to be understood as meaning the “desire” that is bound up with the “soul” or the person. Because everything in the realm of human affairs is transitory, a feeling of emptiness exists. One’s being able to enjoy food and drink is not enough to satisfy deeper desires and longings for a meaningful or purposeful life. The harsh reality that death reduces everything to nothingness makes life appear pointless, unfulfilled. (6:7)

The fact that the “soul,” desire, or appetite is not filled or satisfied prompted Koheleth’s questions, “What gain [is there] to a wise man over the fool? And what [gain is there] to a poor man from knowing how to conduct himself before the living?” Because the wise man possesses sound judgment, he is able to restrain himself respecting longings that are unattainable through proper means. The suppression of his desires does not remove them. They continue to be troubling and disturbing. The fool, the individual with a moral defect, lives for the moment. He recklessly disregards what is right, giving in to his desires and doing whatever it takes to satisfy them. The fool does not think about possible and probable hurtful consequences from his course. Although the wise one and the fool may deal differently with their desires, they are alike in having them. Wisdom does not liberate one from troubling desires. So, in this respect, the wise one has no advantage over the fool. (6:8)

Similarly, the poor man does not really gain or have an advantage from knowing how to keep up appearances in society. He may be able to hide his nagging desires so that others cannot see how deeply disturbed and frustrated he is because of having no hope of fulfilling his longings. The ability to conceal, however, does nothing to eradicate the desires. (6:8)

Since unfulfilled longings greatly diminish the enjoyment of life, Koheleth observed, “Better [is] the sight of the eyes than the wandering about of the soul.” To “see” with one’s eyes signifies possession. It is indeed better to be content with what one has than for one to look longingly and to seek restlessly for something else to bring satisfaction. The “soul” (as in verse 7) denotes the “appetite” or “desire” that fills and occupies the soul or the person. Unfulfilled and unattainable, the desire that occupies the soul is like a wanderer who is unable to find a home. The person plagued with such a nagging desire has no peace. His desire prompts fruitless longing and struggling for the unreachable. As Koheleth said, such “wandering about of the soul” is “also vanity and striving after wind.” It is “vain,” empty, meaningless, futile, or purposeless, never coming to a successful conclusion. The effort expended in longing for the unattainable and seeking the unreachable is a striving after wind, after unsubstantial nothingness. (6:9; see the Notes section.)

To be content with what is seen or possessed, a person needs to appreciate that many things are unchangeable. There must be a willingness to accept the inevitable. Koheleth continued, “Whatever has come to be has already been named, and it is known what man is and that he cannot contend with one mightier than he.” (6:10)

In a general sense, the name by which something is called identifies it as to its nature or purpose. Whatever exists in the present, therefore, is exactly what the name given to it in the past identifies it as being. God named the first man Adam (*’adhám*, apparently denoting an “earthling,” a mortal, one formed from the reddish soil). Regardless of what a man may do or attain, he cannot be anything more than implied in the name of the first human. Accordingly, “what man is has been known” from the very start of human existence. He is an “earthling,” a mere mortal. As such, he is in no position to contend with one who is mightier than he. There is no such thing as his being able to present some argument or make some bargain to keep himself alive indefinitely, proving himself to be greater than his identifying name — “earthling” or mortal.

The one “stronger” than man may be the Creator. (6:10) Koheleth’s thought would then be similar to that found in Psalm 49:7-9 (NIV), “No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him — the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough — that he should live on forever and not see decay.”

There is a possibility, though, that the original-language expression for “one mightier” does not apply to God. The adjective rendered “mightier” or “stronger” (*taqqíph*) is found only here and five other times in Aramaic portions of Ezra (4:20) and Daniel (2:40, 42; 4:3; 7:7), where the reference is not to the Most High. Later in Ecclesiastes (8:8) apparent mention is made of the relentless war that death wages against the living, providing a basis for concluding that death is being called the one who is mightier. The rendering of the Tanakh would allow for this meaning. “As for man, he cannot contend with what is stronger than he.” (6:10)

Koheleth’s next words apparently are to be linked with man’s inability to contend with one who is mightier. His comments may be understood to mean that the more “words” (plural of *davár*) are spoken, the more “vanities” result. Then comes the question, “What benefit [is this] to a man?” A mere mortal is powerless in altering anything that God may do or allow and, in an attempt to change the inevitable, is in no position to contend with the one who is mightier (either the Most High or death). (6:11; for another possible meaning, see the Notes section.)

The more words spoken, the greater would be the vanity or futility of it. In case the one who is mightier denotes the Almighty, man simply must submit to whatever may occur by divine action or permission. There would be no advantage, gain, or benefit for a man to say anything. Man's position in any contention with God is expressed by Job (9:3, 4, NRSV), "If one wished to contend with him, one could not answer him once in a thousand. He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength — who has resisted him, and succeeded?" (6:11)

If the reference is to death, this likewise would emphasize man's powerlessness, and the futility of uttering a single word. No skillful argumentation, no word of protest, would change anything. Death would claim its victim. (6:11)

Evidently since there is no way for one to know or to alter what will take place in the future by God's allowance, Koheleth raised the question, "For who knows what [is] good for man in life, [during] the number of the days of his vain life?" The uncertainties of life make it impossible for one to be certain about what would be "good," or the best thing, for one to pursue in life. Humans cannot be sure that certain objectives can be achieved and, even if they can, that satisfaction will result. What may initially appear desirable may, in the end, turn out to be disappointing. Just how many days a person may have during "his vain life" is also unknown. So, time spent on failed endeavors can never be regained and redirected for a beneficial purpose. Even notable accomplishments are not lasting. All the wearying, exhausting, and painful labor that is expended will eventually come to nothing. The shortness of life, coupled with the transitoriness of all accomplishments, makes it "vain," empty, futile, or meaningless. (6:12)

The brevity of man's life is further stressed by the words, "he spends them like a shadow." A shadow is ever changing and then finally disappears. Likewise, the days of life are soon spent and come to a swift end. (6:12)

No one can tell a man "what will be after him under the sun" (on earth in the realm of human affairs). The words "after him" could denote after the man's death. He could not then be informed about what was happening to the products of his toil that may have passed into the hands of children, grandchildren, and others. It is also possible that "after him" simply denotes "after him in time," without reference to his death. In that case, Koheleth's question could serve to emphasize the impossibility of determining "what is good for man." Since the future is unpredictable, no one knows which ventures will be successful and which ones will fail. (6:12)

Notes:

The Hebrew word *rúach* and its Greek equivalent *pneúma* can mean either "wind" or "spirit." Instead of "striving after wind" or a similar expression (in

verse 9), a number of translations read “vexation of spirit” (KJV, Young). In its rendering of the Septuagint, a new English translation (NETS) uses the expression “preference of spirit,” whereas *The Orthodox Study Bible* says “choice of one’s spirit.” A German translation of the Septuagint (*Septuaginta Deutsch*), however, reads “a striving after wind” (*ein Streben nach Wind*). The Greek term rendered “preference,” “choice,” or “striving” is *proairesis* and can also signify “commitment.” Persons who have committed themselves to, chosen, or preferred something that is mere wind could be spoken of as striving after wind.

In verse 11, the plural of the Hebrew term *davár* can mean “words,” “matters,” “affairs,” or “things.” A number of translators have chosen the meaning “things.” “Since there are many things that increase vanity, How is man the better?” (NKJV) “Seeing there are things in abundance which make vanity abound, what profit hath man?” (Rotherham) “For there are many things multiplying vanity; what advantage [is] to man?” (Young)

If “things” is the intended meaning, the words of Koheleth could relate to the reality that human life is filled with many uncertainties. Nothing is enduring. Everything is subject to change. A person may gain fame and fortune, or he may be disgraced and lose everything. Unforeseen occurrences can increase the “vanity,” emptiness, or purposelessness of life by reducing what is built up to nothingness. So there would be no advantage, profit, or gain from anything that individuals may have or acquire. Sooner or later, they must part with everything.

Ecclesiastes 7:1-29

A good “name” or reputation is better than good “oil [*shémen*]. Olive oil was commonly used, and the Septuagint rendering for *shémen* is *élaion*, meaning “olive oil.” Frequently mixed with a fragrant substance, olive oil was applied to the body. This oil served to protect the exposed skin from the sun’s rays, preventing excessive drying and cracking. Koheleth appears to have used a deliberate play on words — name (*shem*) and oil (*shémen*). As a descriptive expression for the oil, “good” may refer to its fragrant property. Koheleth’s words then could be understood to mean that a good name or fine reputation would be more delightful and satisfying than the pleasing aroma and soothing property of perfumed oil. (7:1)

Anciently, fragrant substances were also very costly. If the emphasis of the qualifier “good” has particular reference to this aspect, Koheleth’s proverbial statement may signify that a good reputation is of greater value than precious perfumed oil. The use of oil, however, was not limited to practical purposes. Whenever the fragrance proved to be the main objective for using the oil, ostentation could well have been involved. So it could be that Koheleth intended

to call attention to the superiority of what has substance — a good reputation. This would be far better than something used merely for the empty display of self — good oil. (7:1)

Koheleth also spoke of the “day of death” as being better than the “day of birth.” At the time of birth, the individual has no name, no reputation. Each day of life provides one with the opportunity to make a good name. A single grave indiscretion can quickly ruin the fine reputation that may have been acquired over the course of many years. Not until the day of one’s death is the identifying name or reputation fixed. Thus, from the standpoint of possessing a good name that is sealed or finalized as such, the “day of death” is indeed better than the “day of birth.” (7:1)

Continuing in the same vein, Koheleth noted that it was better to go to the “house of mourning” than to the “house of feasting.” The “house of mourning” is one where the household has been bereaved of a family member. According to Ecclesiasticus 22:12 (REB), “mourning for the dead lasts seven days.” A person’s going to the “house of mourning” would be to express sympathy and comfort to the bereaved. (7:2)

One’s presence in such a house would serve as a telling reminder that death is an inevitability with which all the living must reckon. The visible evidence of the death forcefully reveals that life is indeed short and that all of one’s plans and work can quickly come to an abrupt termination. Death, which transforms a home into a house of mourning, is the “end” for every man, for every earthling or mortal. This should be taken to “heart,” prompting sober reflection about how the days of one’s life are being spent. (7:2)

Such serious thinking is not encouraged by the atmosphere prevailing in a “house of feasting.” Such a house is a place of reckless abandon, where the main objective is to gratify the senses with food and drink. Especially when the senses are dulled from drinking wine or other alcoholic beverages, no thought is given to the sorrows of others nor to the need for making better use of one’s short life. Regarded from the standpoint of the resulting benefit, one’s going to the “house of mourning” is far better than one’s going to the “house of feasting.” (7:2)

Further stressing the superior value of a serious view of life, Koheleth observed, “Sorrow [is] better than laughter, for by the sadness of the faces the heart is made good.” The word *ká‘as*, commonly translated “sorrow” in this passage, means “anger,” “vexation,” or “irritation,” and this is also conveyed by the corresponding Greek term (*thymós*, “anger,” “fury,” “wrath,” or “rage”) appearing in the Septuagint. Accordingly, the reference may be to the intense disturbing feeling aroused by a heightened awareness of the brevity and uncertainty of life. This internal upheaval is better than the frivolous laughter

associated with a “house of feasting.” Such laughter, which is often the product of alcohol’s dulling effect, does not reflect genuine happiness and produces nothing beneficial. (7:3)

The deep, intense emotions associated with the “house of mourning” cause the countenances of all present to take on a serious, “sad” (*ra’*, “bad,” “disagreeable,” or “cross”) appearance. This contrasts sharply with the “house of feasting,” where laughter or hilarity prevails. The strong emotion that is visible in the serious face can make the heart, the deep inner self, better. This is so because the painful awareness of life’s uncertainties and brevity can motivate the individual to make wiser use of available time and assets. (7:3)

Since a person’s being in the “house of mourning” can prove to be very beneficial, Koheleth added, “The heart of the wise [is] in the house of mourning, and the heart of fools [is] in the house of joy.” The wise are those who use sound judgment when dealing with the problems and common affairs of life. They have the good sense to avoid actions that appear pleasurable but, in the end, would jeopardize their welfare. Fools are persons having a serious moral defect, recklessly disregarding what is proper in speech and conduct. They choose immediate sensual gratification without giving any thought to the possible and probable injurious effects of their acts on themselves and others. (7:4)

Because of their sober view of life, the “heart of the wise” (their deep inner self) is always in tune with the spirit prevailing in the “house of mourning.” Fools, however, live shallow, empty lives that mirror the reckless abandon of a place of merriment. Their heart (their deep inner self) is right at home in the wild atmosphere of a “house of joy,” mirth, or hilarity. (7:4)

With the focus on the benefit or the value, Koheleth added, “It is better [for a man] to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools.” A “rebuke,” censure, or strong expression of disapproval from a wise person (the possessor of sound judgment) is designed to turn one away from the wrong course. While it is not pleasant to be reprimanded, the one who “hears,” pays attention to, or heeds the rebuke, making the needed changes, escapes the hurtful consequences to which failure to turn away from bad would lead. (7:5)

The “song of fools” (those with a serious moral defect) does not promote the pursuit of what is right. Their song often makes light of serious matters, ridiculing what is good and proper. It may even romanticize the sensual and degrading. Instead of providing valuable correction as does the rebuke of the wise, the “song of fools” flatters the listeners, hides their faults from view, and confirms them in their wayward course. (7:5)

Concerning the emptiness of a fool's laughter, Koheleth said, "For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so [is] the laughter of the fool. This also [is] vanity." There is evidently a play on words, as the Hebrew term for "thorn" and "pot" is the same (*sir*). The Tanakh endeavors to preserve this play on words by rendering the Hebrew text, "the crackling of *nettles* under a *kettle*." (7:6)

Dry thorns can be quickly set ablaze. They crackle or snap noisily as they burn but are soon consumed, and so the bright flames disappear. The fire does not last long enough to have any noticeable effect on the contents of the pot. Similarly, the laughter of the fool may be noisy and draw attention, but it accomplishes nothing. While problems may be pushed aside for a moment, they are not removed by an outburst of meaningless hilarity. Especially at an inappropriate time, the fool's laughter is annoying. Possibly the aspect of a disagreeable sound is also included in the reference to the "crackling of thorns." Because nothing of value results from the laughter of fools, it is indeed "vanity," emptiness, purposelessness, or meaninglessness. (7:6)

Koheleth next directed attention to the damaging effects of "oppression" and a "gift," saying, "For oppression makes a wise man crazy, and a gift destroys the heart." Since the Hebrew term *ki* (often rendered "for") does not link the words that follow with those preceding, it is probably to be regarded as an intensifying expression, denoting "surely," "indeed," or "certainly." (7:7)

The reference to "oppression" may be either to its impact on the wise man or to the effect on him for making himself guilty of such. Both the Hebrew term *ʾōsheq* and the corresponding Greek word in the Septuagint (*sykophantía*) can also mean "extortion" or "blackmail." Since extortion is a form of oppression, the significance is basically the same. If the meaning is "extortion," the wise man would be the victim and not the perpetrator. This identification of the wise man as the victim may also be the meaning in the event "oppression" is the preferable rendering. Viewing the wise man as the one subjected to oppression would parallel Koheleth's next words better. It is the "heart" of the one accepting the "gift" that is ruined. The "heart" of the "giver" is already corrupt. (7:7)

"To make crazy" is one meaning of the Hebrew word *halál*. The term frequently denotes "to praise" or "to be boastful." While the meanings appear very dissimilar, there is a connection. Boasting is regarded as foolish. This linkage is illustrated in the following words of the apostle Paul, "Let no one take me for a fool, but if you do, then treat me as a fool, so that I, too, can do a little boasting." (2 Corinthians 11:16, NJB). The Septuagint renders *halál* as *periphéro*, usually meaning "to carry around" or to "carry about" but here having the sense of being "carried away," "brought to a state of unreasoning emotion," or "made crazy." (7:7)

Even a wise man (the possessor of sound judgment), when continually oppressed, may come to a breaking point and speak or act in a rash manner. He may resort to lawless means in an effort to get relief from his difficult situation. Unable to keep intensifying emotions in check, he may lash out against others for minor failings, taking out his frustrations on persons who are not to blame for his distress. (7:7)

Regardless of how wise a man may be, he behaves as one without sense upon becoming an oppressor. It is a grave injustice to subject fellow humans to oppression, violating the innate sense of what is decent, considerate, and fair. The oppressor disregards the feelings of others and ignores their suffering. He views himself as a benefactor and as being fully justified in crushing anyone who dares to question his acts or procedures. (7:7)

The “gift” is evidently a “bribe,” and this is the rendering of many translations (NAB, NIV, NRSV, REB). By accepting a bribe, the individual puts himself under obligation to deal unjustly. Thus the bribe destroys or corrupts the “heart.” Because the Hebrew expression for “heart” (*lev*) may also signify the “mind,” a number of translations read “understanding” (ASV) or “mind” (HCSB, REB). While it is true that there is a deliberate blunting of the faculty of reason, the corruption is really of the whole person. So, it appears preferable to regard the “heart” as signifying the deep inner self. For the sake of material gain, the perverter of justice dismisses all fellow feeling for the one who is injured. The power or authority that should be used to uphold what is right is directed to the wrong purpose, the bribe having been accepted and allowed to wreak havoc on the inmost self. The Septuagint does not include any reference to a “gift,” and manuscripts vary in identifying which aspect of the “heart” (or the person in his inmost self) is destroyed or ruined by oppression, either its “steadfastness” or “courage” (*eutonía*) or its “nobility” (*eugéneia*). (7:7)

Koheleth’s mention of oppression and bribery may have a bearing on the particular sense in which the proverbial sayings that follow are to be understood. While these sayings convey basic truths, they provide helpful guidance when dealing with difficult circumstances.

How something appears at the start may prove to be quite different in the end. Koheleth said, “Better [is] the end of a matter than its beginning. Better [is being] patient of spirit than haughty of spirit.” The Hebrew expression *davár* (“thing,” “affair,” “matter”) also means “word,” and “word” is the basic sense of the Septuagint rendering *lógos*, which, in certain contexts, can also mean “thing” or “matter.” In the Vulgate, the corresponding term is *orationis* (“speech”). One modern translation conveying the same thought is *The New American Bible*, which reads, “Better is the end of speech than its beginning.” (7:8)

In view of the apparent connection with the superiority of a “patient spirit,” however, it appears preferable to understand *davár* to mean “matter,” “thing,” or “affair.” The reference then could be to any matter that would call for the display of a patient spirit. While patience would also be needed in letting the person who is speaking have his full say or in one’s avoiding being hasty with words, rendering *davár* as “speech” or “word” seems to be too limiting when linked with the statement that a patient spirit is better than a haughty spirit. (7:8)

The beginning of a particular situation may be very gloomy or distressing, giving little hope of any improvement. A notable historical example is what developed in the life of Joseph. He was sold to traveling merchants by his jealous half brothers and came to be a slave in Egypt. Later, the wife of his Egyptian master falsely accused him of having made immoral advances toward her, resulting in his being unjustly imprisoned. The distressing situation proved to be the very circumstance that led to Joseph’s attaining the second highest position in Egypt.

This illustrates that one simply cannot know just how certain events may unfold. A person’s failure to submit patiently to a difficult situation, resorting to improper means to liberate himself, may lead to serious loss. Even if the attempt to get relief is successful, the result may be worse than if the individual had patiently waited until proper means for bettering his situation had been used.

The Hebrew expression for “patient of spirit” literally means “long of spirit” (*’erek rúach*). It is the kind of “spirit,” attitude, disposition, or activating principle that is characterized by a willingness to refrain from hasty words or actions when submitted to trying situations. This being “long of spirit” is the opposite of having a “short temper.” (7:8)

Being “haughty” in “spirit” denotes an attitude, disposition, or activating principle distinguished by an elevated or exalted view of self. In Hebrew, “proud” (*gaváh*) does, in fact, signify “high.” The haughty person has no tolerance for dealing with distressing circumstances. Lacking self-restraint, he is easily provoked and, therefore, unwilling to wait for the appropriate time and the proper means to take corrective measures. His rash words and actions often make difficult situations worse for him and others. (7:8)

Further encouraging self-restraint, Koheleth said, “Do not be hasty in your spirit to be irritated, for irritation rests in the bosom of fools.” The “spirit,” the motivating or activating principle, should not be one that quickly and without restraint impels to irritation, provocation, or anger. Recognizing the value and need for self-control, the wise person does not allow himself to be easily disturbed. The fool, the person with a serious moral defect, however, nurses ill will. “Provocation,” irritation, or anger occupies a place in his bosom or at his

breast. There it is nurtured and, as it intensifies, gives rise to hurtful words and reckless, destructive acts. (7:9)

Especially when facing hard times, one may be inclined to think of the past as having been much better. Regarding this, Koheleth observed, “Do not say, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’” Asking such a question would not have its basis in wisdom. For one to look nostalgically to the past as having been much better than the present does not change anything nor help in dealing with problems. Persons who dwell on “former days” may also make the present more difficult for themselves. While some things may have been better in earlier times, this cannot be said about every aspect of life. The passage of time causes the harsh realities of the past to be muted, making the more pleasant features seem to be better than they actually were. Life in a sinful world has never been ideal but has always been accompanied by problems and troubles. It is, therefore, unrealistic for one to look back longingly to “former days” while brooding about the difficulties of the present. Wisdom, or sound judgment, is not the source of such reflection that contributes to one’s being upset and impatient. An irritable, discontented disposition is not the distinguishing attribute of a wise person. (7:10)

Wisdom (sound judgment in the practical matters of life) greatly enhances the value of an inheritance. Koheleth noted, “Wisdom [is] good with an inheritance, and an advantage for those who see the sun.” Without the good sense to manage property and other assets wisely, a person may soon squander an inheritance. When, however, the heir is also the possessor of wisdom, the inherited resources usually increase in value through good management. Thus, wisdom is a real benefit or advantage “for those who see the sun.” It is the living who see the sun, benefiting from its light and warmth. (7:11)

Expanding on the excellent value of wisdom, Koheleth continued, “Wisdom [is] a shadow [*tse*l]; silver is a shadow, and the advantage of knowledge [is]: Wisdom preserves the life of its possessors.” The Hebrew word *tse*l, commonly rendered “shelter,” literally means “shadow,” as does the Greek word *skiá* found in the Septuagint. A shadow provides welcome shelter or protection from the sun’s rays during the hot days of summer. Likewise, both wisdom and money serve as a protective “shadow” or shelter. Wisdom (the ability to deal successfully with life’s problems and to handle daily affairs with sound judgment) protects one from engaging in reckless and thoughtless actions that could endanger one’s welfare. Money or “silver,” the common medium of exchange in Koheleth’s time, enables one to obtain life’s necessities. It shields one from experiencing the pain of hunger and the discomfort resulting from a lack of proper clothing and adequate shelter. (7:12)

Although serving as a protection, “silver” or money can be lost or stolen. Wealth can lead to a person’s becoming the victim of robbery, extortion, or violence. The protective value of “silver” or money is relative. “Knowledge” (essential factual information), coupled with the good sense to use it aright, has superior protective value. Because wisdom (sound judgment) gives the proper direction for the application of knowledge, it preserves the life of its possessors. Wise persons do not take foolhardy risks but give careful forethought to the consequences of their words and actions. Wisdom, therefore, shields them from the possibility of a premature death on account of reckless behavior and thus serves to preserve life. (7:12)

Koheleth earlier pointed to the superiority of a patient spirit. This may have prompted him again to mention the thought that much in the realm of human affairs cannot be changed (1:15), implying that it is foolish to become irritated and angry about such things. Koheleth said, “Consider the work of God. For who can straighten what he has made crooked?” The Hebrew word for “consider” (*ra’áh*) basically means “see” and, in this case, appears to have the sense of “look at” or “reflect upon.” God’s work, the object to be considered, is anything outside the realm of human control that the Almighty may do or permit. Regardless of how crooked, defective, or imperfect it may be, it remains such by divine permission. Any attempt to straighten what God allows to be crooked will not succeed. The course of wisdom is for one to submit humbly and patiently to whatever may take place that is beyond human ability to change through proper means. (7:13)

Since there is no way for one to know in advance exactly what will happen on a particular day, Koheleth recommended, “On a good day be in good[ness] and on a bad day see: This along with that God has made so that man cannot find out anything after him.” A good day is one when things go well. On such a day, one should be “in good.” This may mean that the individual should accept the day appreciatively, reflecting in his own actions and words what is good, kind, generous, or noble. The Septuagint reads, “live in goodness,” which may be understood similarly. There is, however, the possibility that “to be in good” or “to live in goodness” signifies to enjoy the good or goodness, and this is the thought expressed in the renderings of many modern translations. (7:14)

A “bad” or “evil” day is one of adversity. On a day of adversity, one does well to “see” or “recognize” that God has “made” or allowed both the “good” and the “bad.” This kind of “seeing” is reflected in Job’s words: “The good we have been receiving from God, and shall we not receive the bad?” (Job 2:10) Because the Hebrew word for “see” (*ra’áh*) may also mean “consider,” this is the term used in numerous translations. It appears, however, that the thought expressed

by Koheleth is one to be recognized or acknowledged on a bad day rather than one that is to be considered. (7:14)

Because a day can bring either joys or troubles into one's life, no man can tell what "will be after him." The future simply cannot be predicted with accuracy. In view of life's uncertainties, no one can be sure whether prosperity or adversity lie ahead. (7:14)

A person's living uprightly does not guarantee that his days will be free from troubles. Nor does it necessarily follow that the wrongdoer's sins will immediately catch up with him. Koheleth observed, "All [things] I have seen in the days of my vanity: A righteous man is perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man is lengthening [his days] in his wickedness." (7:15)

Because the situations are from the opposite sides of the spectrum, Koheleth could speak of having seen it "all" in the days of his "vanity." The days of life pass quickly, are filled with many uncertainties, and do not allow for the doing of anything that will endure. Accordingly, Koheleth refers to them as days of "vanity," emptiness, meaninglessness, or futility. (7:15)

The Hebrew adjective *tsaddîq* (righteous) and the noun *tsédeq* (righteousness) are descriptive of rectitude or uprightness in conduct. A righteous person does what is right, just, or fair. Because such a one is not immune to disease, adversity, or violence, he may perish in his righteousness. Instead of living a long, happy life, his days may be filled with hardship and end prematurely because of serious illness, accident, war, or assault. (7:15)

In Hebrew, the adjective *rashá'* (wicked) and the noun *ra'* (wickedness) express the opposite of what is good, just, right, or upright. Wicked persons disregard the rights of others and conduct themselves in ways contrary to accepted standards of what is proper, fair, and decent. Yet, there are times, as Koheleth noted, when wicked ones, despite persisting with their evil practices, prosper and live a long time. (7:15) Job made a similar observation, "Why do the wicked live on, reach old age, and grow mighty in power? Their children are established in their presence, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, and no rod of God is upon them. Their bull breeds without fail; their cow calves and never miscarries. They send out their little ones like a flock, and their children dance around. They sing to the tambourine and lyre, and rejoice to the sound of the pipe. They spend their days in prosperity, and in peace they go down to Sheol." (Job 21:7-13, NRSV)

Since life is filled with uncertainties and there is no way for anyone to avoid all problems, it would be truly unwise to make one's days more difficult. Koheleth cautioned against being given to extremes. Concerning righteousness and

wisdom, he said, “Do not be overly righteous, and do not be excessively wise. Why should you destroy yourself?” (7:16)

One who is overly righteous or righteous to an excess insists on the letter of the law, failing to take into consideration human limitations and the need for compassion and understanding. Such a person is quick to make a major issue about minor matters, insisting on strict adherence to certain procedures, rules, or practices even when doing so would prevent one from being helpful and kind to those in genuine need. (7:16)

The Pharisees of the first century CE are an example of persons who were righteous to an excess. When Jesus Christ restored sight to the blind, soundness of limb to the crippled, and health to ailing ones on the Sabbath, they became enraged, condemning him as a sinner deserving of death for violating the Sabbath. (Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:2-18; 9:6-34) They completely lost sight of the fact that the Sabbath was to serve as a day of rest and refreshment from six days of laboring. Therefore, they could not appreciate that the Sabbath was an appropriate day for bringing relief to the afflicted, freeing them from having to bear their heavy burden. The Pharisees’ view of what was righteous prevented them from wanting to see good come to those in need and finding joy in witnessing marvelous healings.

One’s being overly righteous may also manifest itself in practicing extreme self-denial. The individual who is righteous to an excess may view even wholesome pleasures as wrong and condemn those who do not follow an ascetic way of life. (7:16)

One who is overly wise has an exaggerated view of his abilities and knowledge. Regardless of the situation, he presents himself as knowing more than anybody else and possessing superior insight. Such being wise to an excess breeds arrogance, contempt for others, and an overly critical attitude. Considering himself as surpassing others in discernment, the individual is prone to offer unsolicited solutions to problems and may even try to run other people’s lives. (7:16)

According to Koheleth, those who are either overly righteous or wise to an excess put themselves in a dangerous position. They can “destroy” themselves. The overly righteous person could bring ruin to himself by engaging in rash or fanatical actions or speaking out when silence and patient restraint are essential for avoiding bitter and violent quarreling. One who is overly wise alienates others by his attitude, words, and actions. His interjecting himself into matters and situations that are really not his concern may get him into serious difficulties. He may come to be regarded and treated severely as a meddler and one responsible for causing trouble by giving wrong advice. (7:16)

The Hebrew word for “destroy oneself” or “ruin oneself” (*shamém*) may also mean “driven to astonishment,” “be astounded.” This is the significance of the Greek term *ekplésso* (“amaze,” “astound,” “overwhelm”) found in the Septuagint and the Latin expression *obstupesco* (“to become senseless,” “astounded,” “amazed”) appearing in the Vulgate. It is also the meaning of the Hebrew conveyed in the Tanakh, which reads, “you may be dumfounded.” The thought may then be that, contrary to expectations, one could be amazed, astounded, or dumfounded by the negative results from overdoing righteousness or acting too wise. (7:16)

Focusing on extremes that are the opposite of righteousness and wisdom, Koheleth continued, “Do not be overly wicked, nor be a fool. Why should you die before your time?” Koheleth was not saying that a measure of wickedness is acceptable. He simply acknowledged the reality that all humans are from youth inclined to do what is bad, for they are born sinners. (Genesis 8:21) Therefore, Koheleth cautioned against being wicked or bad to an excess, failing to bridle wrong inclinations. The individual who allows his passions and sensual desires to control his actions overdoes wickedness. His is a life of sin, devoid of all restraint and principle. It is characterized by an abuse of freedom and a disregard for the rights of others. (7:17)

Lacking proper motivation, a fool does not use good judgment. His is a moral defect. He disregards law and correction, thoughtlessly and recklessly pursuing whatever appears pleasurable without considering the possible and probable damaging consequences. Because the fool takes needless risks, living at the very edge of danger, he puts his life in jeopardy. It is not uncommon for the fool to die prematurely. By living a promiscuous life, he may contract an incurable disease. He may dissipate his health and strength by indulging in destructive habits. Because of failing to exercise due caution, he may die in an accident. Involvement in a life of crime and violence could lead him to an early grave. (7:17)

Calling attention to what is needed to avoid the results from a life of extremes, Koheleth continued, “Good that you should grasp this and from that do not let your hand rest, for he who fears God shall come forth with all of them.” It appears that the reference is to taking hold of the precepts Koheleth had just enunciated. The good, right, and sensible course is to heed the admonition to avoid being overly righteous and excessively wise, “grasping” or “taking hold” of this guiding principle. At the same time, one should not release one’s hold on the precept about not being too wicked and acting like a fool. There should be no rest or relaxation of the hand, indicative of concerted effort to follow this guiding rule of conduct. (7:18)

While endeavoring not to be overly righteous and excessively wise, a person must be on guard against succumbing to the other extreme — a life of wickedness and folly. A proper fear, awe, or reverence of God will prevent one from becoming a victim of the hurtful consequences of a life characterized by excesses in either righteousness and wisdom or wickedness and folly. (7:18)

One who fears God will “come forth with all of them.” “All” evidently is to be understood in relation to the two precepts, indicating that there would be success on both counts. The Hebrew word *yatsá’* means “come out” or “come forth” and is rendered “will do his duty” in the Tanakh (evidently on the basis of post-Biblical Hebrew) and has also been translated according to its apparent significance, “will succeed” (REB). Another possibility is that “come out” could signify “escape,” which is the sense conveyed in Luther’s German translation (1984 edition) and the German revised *Elberfelder Bibel* (*entgeht dem allen*). This would mean that the one fearing God escapes the problems resulting from being overly righteous and excessively wise or too wicked and foolish. The God-fearing individual avoids all extremes. (7:18)

The fearer of God lives an upright life, uses sound judgment, avoids weakly giving in to wrong desires, and shuns the thoughtless and reckless actions of the fool. Because he is not overly exacting and does not have an inflated opinion of his knowledge and abilities, he is able to enjoy wholesome pleasures and recognizes when kindness and helpfulness take precedence over rules and procedures. Accordingly, the God-fearing person succeeds with reference to both precepts or does his duty regarding them. It can also be said that he escapes the hurtful consequences from ignoring these guiding principles. (7:18)

Continuing to stress the superiority of wisdom, Koheleth said, “Wisdom makes the wise one stronger than ten rulers who are in the city.” The possessor of wisdom, sound judgment, or the ability to use knowledge to solve life’s perplexing problems is not in the weak or helpless condition of persons who are unable to find a way out of difficult situations. Wisdom imparts strength to the wise. (7:19)

The term “ten” may simply be a round number. These “ten” men could be viewed as a complete number of rulers responsible for the security of the city. Because of what the possessor of wisdom or sound judgment can accomplish, his power or strength is greater than that of “ten” men having positions of authority in a city. (7:19)

Although the view has been expressed that the men are chiefs or leaders of military forces, the Hebrew adjective *shallít* does not have this meaning elsewhere in the book of Ecclesiastes (8:8; 10:5). So it appears preferable to understand *shallít* to signify governing authority. This significance has the

support of the Septuagint, which uses the expression *exousiázo* (“to exercise authority”). (7:19)

Perhaps because of having earlier given admonition about not being righteous to an excess, Koheleth introduced the following basic truth, “For there is not a righteous man on the earth who does good and does not sin.” The thought apparently is that no man is so upright as to do good consistently without sinning, without missing the mark of moral rectitude. Accordingly, it would be unreasonable to insist on the letter of the law, demanding flawless conformity to rules and regulations. (7:20)

Another possibility is that Koheleth’s words may be linked to the thought about the strength imparted by wisdom. Since not even one man exists who does not sin, all humans need dependable guidance in order to act wisely. This would imply that God is the ultimate source of wisdom — a point specifically made elsewhere in the Scriptures. (7:20) “With [God] are wisdom and might.” (Job 12:13) “YHWH gives wisdom.” (Prov. 2:6)

Because all humans are sinners, both their words and deeds are flawed. Not everything that is spoken should be taken seriously. Koheleth admonished, “Do not give your heart to all the words [people] speak, lest you hear your servant speaking slightly of you.” (7:21)

The “heart” often denotes the deep inner self. When attention is given to what others say, this can affect the “heart” or the inmost self of the individual doing so. A person should avoid giving serious attention to everything that others might say. Undue concern or curiosity about their words could result in hearing unfavorable remarks from persons who might be regarded as least likely to make such. Even when comments are highly commendatory, the person giving extraordinary attention to such can be negatively affected. The individual may come to have an exaggerated view of self. (7:21)

In Israelite society, a servant or slave might have been a fellow countryman who sold himself or had been sold into temporary slavery to pay off debts or to make compensation for wrongs. There were also non-Israelite slaves, often captives of war, who had been purchased and, unlike Hebrew slaves, did not gain liberty in the seventh year of servitude. A servant or slave was expected to show respect for his owner or master. (Malachi 1:6) Therefore, a servant’s reviling his master would not have been a common occurrence. Nevertheless, because of unusually heavy demands put upon him, even a trusted servant might be brought to the point of cursing or speaking ill, slightly, or contemptuously of his master. The owner might come to overhear such remarks or they could be reported to him. By referring to a situation that was out of the ordinary, Koheleth stressed

his point about not taking every comment seriously and permitting it to have a disturbing effect. (7:21)

Calling attention to the need for being reasonable in one's view of what others might say, Koheleth added, "For also your own heart knows that many times you, even you, have spoken slightly of others." Within the deep inner self, the individual "knows" or is fully aware of what he has said. In an upset state, he often may have uttered harsh, rash words, without malicious intent. Since he would not want such slighting words or reviling to be taken seriously, he should treat the expressions of others similarly, not giving them undue attention and becoming upset. (7:22)

The extant Septuagint text contains an expanded reading, indicating that a slave might often do injury to his owner and bring hurt to the owner's heart, or make himself responsible for emotional pain. This is followed by the reminder that the owner also had cursed others. (7:22)

The conclusions that Koheleth reached were the product of diligent investigation and sober reflection. He said, "All this I proved by wisdom." The Hebrew word *nasáh* denotes "prove" or "test," and translations vary in the use of either meaning. Apparently Koheleth was guided by wisdom or good judgment when "testing," "proving," or evaluating his careful observations. He made sure that the conclusions he drew were reliable. (7:23)

Koheleth sincerely endeavored to be wise or have real insight or sound judgment. He expressed this resolve with determination, "I will be wise." In the ultimate sense, however, wisdom eluded him. He acknowledged, "and it was far from me." (7:23)

Koheleth recognized that much he simply could not grasp or understand. Developing this aspect, he continued, "Far off [is] that which is, and deep, deep. Who can find it?" "That which is" or "whatever is" apparently designates what exists on account of God's doing or allowance. Concerning the reason for "whatever is," how it fits into an overall purpose, or what effect it might have in future developments, Koheleth recognized that it "is far off" — incomprehensible, out of reach. Stressing the inability to fathom "that which is," Koheleth repeated the Hebrew term for "deep." This intensifying by repetition indicates that the matter is exceedingly deep. The implied answer to Koheleth's question is that no human "can find it out," as "whatever is" or exists is too distant and too deep. (7:24)

Again focusing attention on human affairs, Koheleth said (according to a literal rendering of the Hebrew), "I turned — I and my heart — to know and to

investigate and to seek wisdom and reckoning [*cheshbóhn*] and to know the wickedness of stupidity, and the foolishness of madness.” (7:25)

“Turning” apparently means “directing attention to.” In relation to the “turning,” the words “I and my heart” may be understood in basically two ways. (1) Both Koheleth and his “heart,” his inmost self (or his mind), did the “turning,” the “focusing upon,” or the “directing of attention to.” This would indicate that he gave the matters of his reflection more than surface attention; his inmost self was involved. (2) Koheleth did the “turning,” and his heart desired “to know and to investigate.” Whereas he did the focusing, his heart (his inmost self, or his mind) impelled him. (7:25)

Understanding the term “heart” to designate the “mind” in this case, many translators have chosen the rendering “mind.” Since, however, giving attention to a matter (which Koheleth had already mentioned) is a function of the mind, the preferable meaning for “heart” may be the “inmost self.” Besides using the word “mind,” a number of versions do not translate the conjunction “and” in the phrase, “I turned — I *and* my heart” but read, “I turned my mind” (NIV, NRSV). This has the support of Hebrew manuscripts that say, “with my heart,” which reading appears to reflect a scribal alteration. To link the expression “I turned” to the words “with my heart” would also require a structural change in the Hebrew text. (7:25)

Although realizing that many things were beyond his ability to fathom, Koheleth had not given up his ardent desire “to know” or to understand all that he possibly could. He also continued “to investigate,” “examine,” or “explore” activities and events in the realm of human affairs. Koheleth’s “seeking” was for “wisdom” and “reckoning.” The word “reckoning” translates the Hebrew term *cheshbóhn*, which has also been defined as “account,” “result,” and “understanding.” In the Vulgate, the word is rendered *ratio*, which can signify “reason,” “motive,” “ground,” “principle,” “reckoning,” “account,” “procedure,” “method,” “system,” or “computation.” The Greek term in the Septuagint, *pséphos*, means “pebble.” Since pebbles were used when counting, reckoning, or calculating, the apparent meaning is “reckoning.” Preserving the thought of “reckoning” or “calculating,” the *New Revised Standard Version* reads, “to seek wisdom and the sum of things.” It appears that Koheleth wanted to know how the things he observed “added up,” or what they signified. This required careful examination and evaluation on his part, with resulting insight or understanding. (7:25)

Translators vary in the way they render the Hebrew “and to know the wickedness of stupidity and the folly of madness.” (1) In the Tanakh, “wickedness, stupidity, madness, and folly” are simply listed as aspects of Koheleth’s study. (2) The words have also been translated “wickedness of folly”

and “the foolishness of madness.” (Green) This would mean that “stupidity” or “folly” (moral senselessness) is “wicked” (contrary to God’s standard of uprightness) and that “madness” (irrationality, opposition to sound reason) is “folly” (a lack of sound judgment in the practical matters of life, coupled with a moral defect). Accordingly, the person with a moral defect (the “fool”) is wicked or corrupt, and the one who acts foolishly is mad or irrational, failing to use his reasoning faculties aright. (3) *The Revised English Bible* makes a distinction between the “to know” used with reference to wisdom and the “to know” linked to “wickedness” and “foolishness.” This translation reads, “I went on to reflect how I could know, inquire, and search for wisdom and for the reason in things, only to discover that it is folly to be wicked and madness to act like a fool.” (7:25)

It appears that the second rendering (“wickedness of stupidity” and “foolishness of madness”) is preferable, as no addition to or deletion (as in the case of the first rendering) of any Hebrew terms is required when translating, the “of” being understood in this Hebrew construction. The third rendering requires a measure of interpretation that is not readily discernible from the Hebrew text. (7:25)

According to Rahlfs’ edition of the Septuagint, the concluding words are, “to know the senselessness of the impious one and hardness [*sklerían*] and madness.” Fourth-century Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, however, do not read *sklerían*, but *ochlerían*, meaning “tumult,” “agitation,” or “rioting.” In its departure from the extant Hebrew text, the Septuagint focuses on the corrupt behavior of the ungodly man — his senselessness, his hardness or mercilessness (or, according to fourth-century manuscripts, the trouble he causes), and his madness or stubborn disregard for what is right. (7:25)

After a careful and thorough examination of human affairs, Koheleth was moved to single out an immoral woman as the gravest danger for a man. He noted, “And I found more bitter than death the woman who is snares and her heart dragnets, her hands fetters.” These words are not a reference to womankind but to the particular kind of woman described, an immoral woman or prostitute. (7:26)

It is a “bitter” or painful experience to be reduced to lifelessness and to have all of one’s labor come to nothing. Death is indeed something bitter. While death does not destroy a good name, involvement with a prostitute does. Besides contracting a loathsome disease, a married man may infect his wife. His relationship with a prostitute can also lead to the financial ruin of his family. Since the consequences from involvement with her are more serious than those from death, such a woman is “more bitter than death.” (7:26)

Since a prostitute endeavors to allure, entice, or catch men in various ways, she is likened to “snares” (*matsóhdh*, designating a net or snare used by a hunter). The “heart,” the deep inner self of the prostitute, is compared to “dragnets” (*chérem*). A prostitute’s words, thoughts, and bearing are the expressions of her “heart” or her deep inner self and are designed to entangle as do “nets” or “dragnets.” Her hands, used in caressing and embracing, are like “fettters” (*’esúr*), “bonds” or “chains” (*desmós*, LXX) with which captives are bound. (7:26)

Regarding one who escapes and one who is ensnared, Koheleth continued, “One good before the face of God shall escape from her, but the sinner will be captured by her.” The man who is good or pleasing to God by reason of his upright conduct does not allow himself to be enticed by an immoral woman. A sinner (one whose life consistently misses the mark of moral rectitude) does not bridle his passion and, therefore, is captured by the prostitute. He yields to her allurements. (7:26)

Koheleth was very diligent and thorough when observing and studying human affairs. Commenting on this aspect, he said, “See, this I have found, says Koheleth, one by one to find the sum.” The words “this I have found” appear to refer to the conclusion to which Koheleth came after having completed his investigation. When, however, saying “one by one,” he evidently meant that he carefully examined one thing after another, looking at each individually and endeavoring to determine what bearing it had in relation to the other and, finally, on the collective whole. Based on this careful, detailed investigation, Koheleth purposed to arrive at the “sum” — a conclusion regarding what he had studiously considered. In view of his previous comments about a seductive woman, he was possibly referring to all the unfavorable aspects that he had examined in detail — “one by one.” (7:27)

Perhaps concerning his unsuccessful seeking for the ideal in womankind, Koheleth said, “that my soul still seeks, and I have not found — one man among a thousand I have found, and a woman among all of these I have not found.” In referring to “my soul,” Koheleth apparently meant his entire being. His search was a continuous one, not one of short duration and limited interest and attention. He put his all (his whole being or soul) into his continual seeking or searching. (7:28)

During the course of his seeking and searching, Koheleth found that the ideal man was rare — one in a thousand. Based on his experience with many wives, concubines, and other women, however, he did not find even one woman, one who was deserving of the name. (7:28)

Koheleth's observation appears to indicate that many women had sunk to a very low standard as respects attitude, speech, and conduct. Foreign influence, luxurious living, and the adoption of idolatrous worship, which included ceremonial prostitution, may have contributed to the ruin of women at that time. (1 Kings 11:3-8) Exemplary women had become so rare that not even one could be found among a thousand. The following description from later periods in the writings of Isaiah and Amos may give some indication of what Koheleth observed about the women in his day. "The daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with outstretched necks, glancing wantonly with their eyes, mincing along as they go, tinkling with their feet." (Isaiah 3:16, NRSV) "Hear this word, you cows of Bashan who are on Mount Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, 'Bring something to drink!'" (Amos 4:1, NRSV)

Although corruption abounded among men and women, Koheleth recognized that God was not to blame for this. He noted, "See, this alone I have found, that God made man upright, and they: they have sought out many devices." Apparently regarding the conclusion that he had drawn, Koheleth said, "I have found." These words appear to refer to the same conclusion as those of verse 27 ("I have found"), which introduced the section about a corrupt woman. (7:29)

The first man was created without any moral defect but deliberately chose to disregard God's command. Since then, humans in general have disregarded the voice of conscience (the God-given sense of right and wrong) and whatever has been available to them of the revealed word of God. Instead of seeking to adhere to the divine standards of conduct, they have sought out their own "devices." The Hebrew word for "device" (*chishshavóhn*) also denotes "plan" or "invention." In the Septuagint, the corresponding Greek term is *logismós*, meaning "calculation," "reasoning," "thought," or "reflection." Being the product of sinful humans, the devices, plans, or thoughts have led to ever-increasing deviation from the divine standard. (7:29)

Ecclesiastes 8:1-17

Highlighting the positive aspect of wisdom, Koheleth raised the questions, "Who [is] like the wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a matter?" The implied answer to the first question is that, with the exception of another sage, there is no one like him. Among those not distinguished for wisdom, he is without compare. According to the reading of the Septuagint, the initial question is, "Who knows [or understands] the wise?" Only those who are truly wise can be said to know or understand the wise, as they are able to identify with them and with their reasoning. (8:1)

In the Septuagint, the second question is basically the same as in the Hebrew text. “And who knows the interpretation [*lýsis*] of a saying [*rhéma*]?” The Greek word *lýsis* means “loosing” or “untying,” and it is the term used for “divorce.” In this context, it can mean either “interpretation” or “solution.” Although the basic sense of *rhéma* is “saying,” this Greek word, like the Hebrew *davár* can also mean “matter,” “thing,” or “affair.” Only a wise man “knows the interpretation of a matter.” Because a sage truly “knows” or understands a matter or what might be expressed, he can explain things or present a sound solution for a problem. (8:1)

In this verse, translators of the Hebrew text have rendered *davár* as “thing” (NRSV), “things” (NAB, NIV, NJB), and “anything” (REB). Translators of the Septuagint commonly have not chosen this meaning but render the Greek *rhéma* as “word” (*Septuaginta Deutsch*), “what is said” (NETS), and “saying” (Brenton). An exception is *The Orthodox Study Bible*, which reads “thing.” (8:1)

In its rendering of the Hebrew text, the Tanakh conveys the sense of saying but specifically identifies the saying as an adage that is then quoted. “Who is like the wise man, and who knows the meaning of the adage: ‘A man’s wisdom lights up his face, so that his deep discontent is dissembled’?” (8:1)

The reference to “lighting up” the face or making it “shine” could refer to the good effect that the possession of wisdom has on a person’s countenance. Wisdom causes the face to reflect courage, contentment, and calmness. It gives no indication of insecurity, bewilderment, confusion, or undue apprehension. Unlike the downcast, gloomy countenance of one in a frightened, disoriented, or troubled state, the appearance of the wise man’s face is bright, indicative of inner joy, security, and clarity of vision and direction. (8:1)

Kohелеth’s next observation has been variously understood. The Hebrew text can be literally rendered, “And the hardness [*‘oz*, ‘strength’ or ‘might’] of his face is changed.” In connection with wisdom, these words have been paraphrased to indicate a positive change or transformation of the face. “Wisdom makes you cheerful and gives you a smile.” (CEV) “Wisdom lights up the face, enlivening a grim expression.” (NJB) “Wisdom brightens a man’s face and changes its hard appearance.” (NIV) “A man’s wisdom illumines him and causes his stern face to beam.” (NASB) “Wisdom lights up a person’s face, softening its hardness.” (NLT) “Wisdom brings happiness; it makes sad faces happy.” (NCV) According to these renderings, wisdom changes the “face” or countenance that looks serious, stern, or even forbidding, transforming it into an appealing countenance or causing the “hardness” of the face to disappear. (8:1)

The Hebrew term *‘oz*, translated “hardness,” usually denotes “strength,” and is rendered *anaidés* in the Septuagint, meaning “shameless,” “hard,” “impudent,”

or “bad.” Anciently, written Hebrew gave no indication for vowel sounds, and the twenty-first letter of the alphabet was not distinguished by the use of a diacritical mark to show whether the pronunciation should be “s” or “sh.” The Hebrew term for “change” is *shanáh*, and the Aramaic word for “change” (*shaná’*) is written in the same way as the Hebrew term *sané’*, denoting “hate.” The Septuagint renders the Hebrew word as “hate,” and certain modern translations that have adopted this meaning also convey the same meaning as the Septuagint, which reads, “And an impudent [man] — his face will be hated.” “An impudent look is resented.” (NAB) “An impudent countenance will be hated.” (*Ein freches Angesicht wird gehasst*. [Luther, 1984 edition]) “He who is impudent shall be hated.” (Lamsa, translated from the Syriac) (8:1)

The Hebrew consonants for “change” or “hate” are followed by three letters. These three letters mean “I” (*’ani*), but there is no verb. (8:2) Translators who preserve the meaning “I” understand it to refer to Koheleth and, either at the beginning of verse 2 or later in the verse, variously read, “I say” (ESV, NASB, NIV, NKJV, NLB), “I said” (Rotherham), “I pray thee” (Young), or “I do!” (Tanakh)

Koheleth admonished, “Take heed of the king’s mouth.” This would signify that one should act on the words that proceed from the ruler’s mouth, obeying his commands. Possibly pointing to the reason for doing so, Koheleth continued, “and because of the word of the oath of God.” (8:2) A number of translations make this meaning explicit. “Obey the king’s command, I say, because you took an oath before God.” (NIV) “I say, ‘Obey the words of the king because of the promise you made to God.’” (NLB) “Obey the king because you have vowed before God to do this.” (NLT)

The reference may be to the oath expressed before God by representative members of the nation to remain loyal to the monarch. This was done at the start of the king’s reign. (2 Samuel 5:3; 1 Chronicles 11:3; 29:24) The oath itself would have been regarded as obligating every member of the nation to be faithful to the sovereign. Another possibility is that the “oath of God” refers to God’s oath-bound promise to David that kingship would remain in his line of descent. (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalm 89:20-36 [21-37]) This would indicate that any plots to overthrow the Davidic dynasty would have been contrary to God’s purpose. (8:2)

Continuing to focus on the subject’s relationship to the ruler, Koheleth said, “Do not be hasty [*bahál*] to leave his presence.” This could denote that a person should avoid being quick to change loyalties, joining a rebel cause. Koheleth added, “Do not take a stand in an evil thing.” The “evil” or “bad” thing could be a plot against the monarch, or anything the king regarded as bad. (8:3) A number of translations make this significance explicit and link it to the oath mentioned

in the previous verse. “In view of your oath to God, be not hasty to withdraw from the king; do not join in with a base plot.” (NAB) “If you promised God that you would be loyal to the king, I advise you to keep that promise. Don’t quickly oppose the king.” (CEV)

Besides meaning “to haste,” the Hebrew term *bahál* may be defined “to be terrified” or “to be confounded.” Adopting the meaning “terrified” gives Koheleth’s words a very different significance. “Do not be terrified; go from his presence, do not delay when the matter is unpleasant.” (NRSV) According to this rendering, the advice would be not to fear making a judicious retreat from the king’s presence in the face of an “evil thing,” an “unpleasant” or a “dangerous” matter or situation. Since, however, the Septuagint and the Vulgate convey the sense of haste, there is a basis for not viewing this as the preferable understanding of the verse. (8:3)

Another possible meaning of Koheleth’s admonition is based on linking “haste” with the oath of God. A literal reading of the Hebrew would be, “And because of the word of the oath of God, do not be hasty. Leave his presence. Do not stand in a bad thing.” (8:3) George Lamsa’s translation (verses 2 and 3) of the Syriac conveys this meaning. “Keep the king’s command, and in regard of the oath of God be not hasty. Go from his presence; and do not stand firm in an evil matter.” The renderings of a number of other translations are similar. “I do! ‘Obey the king’s orders — and don’t rush into uttering an oath by God.’ Leave his presence; do not tarry in a dangerous situation.” (Tanakh) “Do as the king commands you, and if you have to swear by God, do not rush into it.” (REB)

Taking Koheleth’s counsel about the “oath” as a directive to avoid haste in uttering such, however, seems to interrupt the flow of the development and also requires understanding the noun “word” (*davár*) to express an action (“uttering” an oath or “swearing” an oath). The Hebrew text can be understood without having to introduce the taking of an oath in a way that does not appear to relate to Koheleth’s subject, and this would appear to be preferable. The admonition could simply mean that one should avoid haste in the matter of the oath — one already taken. This would signify that a person should not be rash or hasty in violating the solemn promise to be faithful to the monarch or in giving the ruler cause to suspect disloyalty. (8:3)

The concluding words of verse 3 are, “For all he pleases he does.” This stresses the inadvisability of opposing or displeasing the king. By virtue of his great authority, the monarch could do whatever he pleased in acting against a subordinate who incurred his displeasure. So, instead of “standing” or persisting in a thing that the ruler viewed as bad, the individual would leave the king’s presence, not foolishly trying to convince him about the rightness of the position being taken. “Don’t quickly oppose the king or argue when he has already made

up his mind.” (CEV) The person doing so would only bring trouble upon himself. If, however, the hastiness is associated with not leaving the king’s presence, it would be a matter of avoiding what he regards as bad, not giving up a position or changing loyalties in the face of unfavorable developments. “Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases.” (NIV) “Do not be obstinate in a bad cause, since the king will do what he likes in any case.” (NJB [This translation, however, refers to not being in a hurry to depart from the “divine promise” or God’s oath.]) Since the king could do as he pleased, it would have been wiser to accept even an unwarranted correction or punishment instead of resisting defiantly or rebelling. (8:3)

The authority of the royal office was such that what the king said had to be obeyed. His word was law. For this reason, the monarch could do whatever he pleased. As Koheleth continued, “For his word is dominant, and who can say to him, ‘What are you doing?’” (8:4)

“Dominant” is a rendering of the Hebrew *shiltóhn* and denotes “that which has power” or is authoritative. Since the king’s word was authoritative, no one could successfully challenge him, questioning his actions. For one to have defied the monarch’s word would have led to severe punishment. (8:4)

Koheleth observed regarding a loyal subject, “Whoever heeds the command will not know an evil thing.” The “evil” or “bad” thing would be the penalty imposed for disobeying the royal directive. An obedient citizen would not come to “know” or “experience” the monarch’s displeasure and the accompanying punishment. (8:5)

Apparently with reference to dealing with an unjust king, Koheleth noted, “A wise heart knows both time and judgment.” “Wise” signifies having “sound judgment.” The “heart” (either the mind or the individual’s deep inner self) “knows” or recognizes when and how to act in a given situation. The Hebrew term for time (*‘eth*) denotes a proper, fit, or appropriate time. A wise person is quick to recognize the opportune time and then takes appropriate action. Since that time may be brief, any needless delay in doing something positive could result in missing the right opportunity. Besides recognizing the right time, the “wise heart” knows judgment. The Hebrew term for “judgment” (*mishpát*) often signifies “justice” or a “legal decision.” In this case, however, it appears to denote a way, method, or procedure for doing something. Accordingly, the person having a “wise heart” also “knows” or has the needed insight about what should be done under the existing circumstances. He thus avoids bringing needless trouble upon himself and others on account of speaking or acting at the inappropriate time and in the wrong manner. (8:5)

The need for being able to discern the suitable time and the correct method is further emphasized by Koheleth's words, "For every affair there is a time and judgment." In the earthly realm, with its innumerable cyclical events, all things have their time (though it may be very short) and some kind of decision may have to be rendered respecting them. So, there is an appropriate time for the affair itself and an opportune time for taking some action with reference to it. Additionally, there is a right or suitable way of dealing with the "affair," "matter," "business," or "enterprise." (8:6)

Possibly to caution against failing to recognize that every affair has its "time and judgment," Koheleth added, "for the evil [knowledge, LXX] of man [is] great upon him." The "bad" or "evil" could refer to the distressing or troublesome things that man experiences throughout his life or, more specifically, oppression from an unjust ruler. Since all members of the human family — all earthlings or mortals — already have their share of problems and difficulties, they would be unwise to add to their daily burden by acting rashly, disregarding that an appropriate time and a right way of dealing exist for every affair. "A man's misery weighs heavily upon him." (NIV) "Life is hard." (CEV) The thought may be similar to that expressed by Jesus Christ when counseling against worrying, "Sufficient for a day is its own evil." (Matthew 6:34, NAB). The Septuagint rendering could be understood to mean that what a man comes to know or experience is a heavy burden for him. (8:6)

Since "evil of man" could denote man's own badness or wickedness, this has given rise to the conclusion that the reference is to an oppressive king. The words "great upon him" have been taken to indicate that his day of reckoning is at hand for cumulative "great" badness. It is more likely, however, that "evil of man" signifies either the bad resulting to those subjected to oppressive rulership or the troubles common to mortals. (8:6)

Some translations link "evil" with Koheleth's next words about man's inability to know what will happen in the future — "what will be." "But misfortune lies heavy upon anyone who does not know what the outcome will be, no one is going to say how things will turn out." (NJB) "Yet it is a great affliction for man that he is ignorant of what is to come; for who will make known to him how it will be?" (NAB) While it is true that man does not know just what might take place in the future, this in itself is not an evil. A wise man's not knowing the future would not preclude his recognizing an opportune time and taking suitable action, and so it appears preferable not to limit the significance of "evil" to man's ignorance about what may lie ahead of him. (8:6, 7)

Instead of being something "bad," man's not knowing "what will be" can actually serve as a safeguard against being rash or hasty. Koheleth earlier spoke about the monarch's absolute authority and the inadvisability of being

disobedient. Because of not knowing what lies ahead, the individual needs to evaluate whether the time is right for appropriate action and not rush into a course without any thought about possible or probable adverse consequences. Besides not knowing “what will be,” the individual cannot rely on someone else to tell him “when” or “how it shall be.” Koheleth’s question about who can tell him “when” or “how it shall be” and its implied answer — no other mortal — may serve to show the inadvisability of allowing others to persuade one to act at the wrong time and in the wrong manner. (8:7)

Having discussed the authoritativeness of the king’s word and the inadvisability of defying it, Koheleth proceeded to focus on the opposite, on what cannot be controlled by any human. “Man is not in control [*shallít*] over the spirit to restrain the spirit.” The Hebrew term *shallít* here signifies “to have control or authority over.” Mere earthlings have no control “over the spirit.” The Hebrew word translated “spirit” (*rúach*) can refer either to the “wind (NJB, NRSV) or to the “life principle” (“breath of life” [NAB, REB]; “lifebreath” [Tanakh]). In view of what follows about the day of death, it appears preferable to regard the reference to be to the “spirit” or the “life principle.” No earthling can “restrain” or prevent the “breath of life” from leaving the body. What happens to the life principle is not within the sphere of human authority or control. (8:8)

Koheleth next observed that man has no authority in the day of death. When it comes to the end of life, humans cannot do anything. There simply is no way for death to be held at bay. (8:8)

If linked with death, the words “no discharge from war” relate to the continual war that death wages against the living. No clever scheming or manipulation can save anyone from becoming a casualty in that war, as Koheleth added, “nor will wickedness deliver its owners.” The “owners” or possessors of wickedness are persons whose lives are characterized by doing what is unjust and hurtful. In effect, the practice of wickedness is their occupation. They are experts in cleverly maneuvering to evade punishment and to gain their unworthy ends. Even they, however, are unable to devise a scheme that would allow them to escape becoming a victim in the war that death wages. Their wickedness will not deliver them from the day of death. (8:8)

Some prefer to emend the Hebrew text, favoring the reading “riches” or “wealth” instead of “wickedness.” The rendering of *The Revised English Bible* is, “No wealth will save its possessor.” The reading “wealth” is based on an assumption that a scribal error is involved. In Hebrew, the word “wickedness” consists of three consonants — resh (r), shin (sh) and ayin (‘). When the ayin and the resh are transposed, the consonants are those for the term “riches.” Understanding the reference to be to “riches” would fit the context and also would harmonize with the thought expressed elsewhere in the Scriptures. (Psalm

49:6-9) There is, however, no basis in the Septuagint, the Syriac, or the Vulgate for departing from the rendering “wickedness.” Since Koheleth’s words are understandable without an emendation, there is insufficient reason for adopting the reading “riches.” (8:8)

Koheleth’s words in verse 8 have also been viewed as different illustrations of what man is unable to control. (1) He has no authority over the wind, directing it to blow only where wanted or causing it to intensify, lessen in force, or stop completely. (2) No mortal can avoid the day of death. (3) A man cannot get a discharge from war when, for example, the battle is in progress. According to this understanding of the verse, the three illustrations are linked with the thought expressed previously. Just as man does not know what will take place in the future, he is likewise powerless with reference to the “wind,” the “day of death,” and the “war.” While the language would allow for this explanation, it does not fit in well with the concluding words about the deliverance that cannot be effected by wickedness. Accordingly, it appears better to take everything that is said in verse 8 as relating to death.

When Koheleth said, “all this I have seen,” he apparently included his observations about the absolute power of a king in the realm of human affairs, the inadvisability of disobeying the monarch’s word, and the recognition of the right time and the proper method. What Koheleth saw was not something that merely caught his momentary attention. His observation involved careful and deliberate examination, for he continued, “I gave my heart to every work that is done under the sun.” This may be understood to mean that he really put his mind to investigating all human activities taking place in the earthly realm beneath the sun or that his total being, his inner self, was involved in this careful examination of what mortals do. (8:9)

Koheleth referred to the “time (in) which man controls man to his evil.” This appears to signify that Koheleth made his observation during the time in which one earthling or mortal dominated another mortal, with resulting evil or hurt to the one subjected to tyranny. The words “to his evil” could refer to the tyrant, and this is the meaning conveyed by *The New Jerusalem Bible* (“while one person tyrannises over another to the former’s detriment”). Although the oppressive ruler may reap hurtful consequences for his unjust actions, this is not always the case. The ones who are dominated, on the other hand, do suffer. So, it appears preferable to regard the “evil” as applying to the earthling who is oppressed. A number of modern translations make this explicit (“while men still had authority over men to treat them unjustly” [Tanakh]; “while one person exercises authority over another to the other’s hurt” [NRSV]; “at a time when one person had power over another and could make him suffer” [REB]). (8:9)

Possibly to indicate that the end comes for those whose rule results in suffering for others, Koheleth said that he “saw” or observed that the “wicked” (those whose conduct is characterized by an utter disregard for what is just and right) were buried. Despite their notorious deeds, they were accorded the dignity of interment. (8:10)

It may be with reference to the time such wicked ones were living that Koheleth continued, “and they came into and went out from the holy place.” The “holy place” likely designates the temple in the city of Jerusalem, where the wicked carried out their formalistic worship. (8:10) God’s displeasure with such worship is expressed in Isaiah 1:11-13 (NJB). “‘What are your endless sacrifices to me?’ says Yahweh. ‘I am sick of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of calves. I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come and present yourselves before me, who has asked you to trample through my courts? Bring no more futile cereal offerings, the smoke from them fills me with disgust. New Moons, Sabbaths, assemblies — I cannot endure solemnity combined with guilt.’”

Perhaps regarding oppressive rulers, Koheleth noted that they “were forgotten in the city where they had thus done.” Once buried, such wicked ones would not remain long in the memory of the living. Because they would be forgotten as if they had never existed, their brief life would prove to have been vain, empty, meaningless, or purposeless. This may be the point of Koheleth’s concluding words, “this also [is] vanity.” (8:10) A number of translations have made such meaning explicit in their renderings. “Then I saw the sinful buried, who used to go in and out of the holy place. They are soon forgotten in the city where they did this. This also is for nothing.” (NLB) “So then, I have seen the wicked buried, those who used to go in and out from the holy place, and they are soon forgotten in the city where they did thus. This too is futility.” (NASB) Another possible significance is that people soon forgot how the wicked had conducted themselves. “And again, I have observed the wicked carried to their graves, and people leaving the holy place and, once out in the city, forgetting how the wicked used to behave; how futile this is too!” (NJB)

Other translations convey very different meanings. This is because the Hebrew text is somewhat obscure and the readings of Hebrew manuscripts and ancient versions differ. Some translators have chosen to emend the text or to follow the readings of ancient versions that also have the support of a few Hebrew manuscripts.

The Hebrew term *ken*, usually meaning “so” or “thus,” may also denote “rightly,” “justly,” or “aptly.” This has given rise to renderings that contrast what happens to those who do what is right with what is experienced by the wicked in being given an honorable burial. “I saw the wicked buried with honor,

but God’s people had to leave the holy city and were forgotten.” (CEV) “And then I saw scoundrels coming from the Holy Site and being brought to burial, while such as had acted righteously were forgotten in the city.” (Tanakh) A departure from the meaning “thus” or “so” for *ken* is not confirmed by the Septuagint reading, *hoútos* (“thus”). (8:10)

While supporting the rendering “acted righteously,” the Vulgate applies the expression to the wicked (“as though they had acted righteously”). Since there is no clear indication in the Hebrew text and in the ancient versions that the reference is to two groups (the wicked and the righteous), it appears preferable to view the entire verse as applying to the wicked. Also, the available evidence does not seem to warrant departing from the usual meaning of *ken* (“thus”). (8:10)

Both the Septuagint and the Vulgate are in agreement in reading “praised” (as also do some Hebrew manuscripts) instead of “forgotten.” In their renderings, numerous modern translations use “receive praise” or “were praised.” “Then too, I saw the wicked buried — those who used to come and go from the holy place and receive praise in the city where they did this.” (NIV) “Then I saw the wicked buried; they used to go in and out of the holy place, and were praised in the city where they had done such things.” (NRSV) “I also saw sinful people being buried. They used to come and go from the place of worship. And others praised them in the city where they worshiped. That doesn’t have any meaning either.” (NIRV) While corrupt persons may be praised or honored, this would not customarily be the case, and so the Vulgate rendering seems to convey a more appropriate meaning (“praised ... as though they had acted righteously”). This wording is not corroborated by the Septuagint and would require emending the Hebrew text. Especially since the Hebrew can be understood without resorting to an emendation, it appears preferable not to follow the reading of the Vulgate. (8:10)

Commenting on the bad result from a failure immediately to bring wrongdoers to justice, Koheleth said, “Because sentence is not executed swiftly against an evil deed, therefore the heart of the sons of man is filled in them to do evil.” In the case of lawbreakers, justice may be slow in coming, if at all. As a result, humans or earthlings (“sons of man”) may begin to reason that it is easy to escape punishment for wrongdoing. The heart, either the mind or the inmost self, becomes filled with the desire to do what is bad, the objective being to profit from corrupt actions without incurring any penalties. (8:11)

Whereas Koheleth observed that wrongdoers may repeatedly evade punishment for their crimes, he stressed the superiority of leading an upright life, saying, “Although a sinner does evil a hundred times and [life] continues long for him, yet I know that it will be good for those who fear God, because they fear before

his face.” The sinner is one who habitually misses the mark with reference to upright conduct. In attitude, words, and actions, he has no regard for what is right and just. He conducts his affairs of life in a way that ignores any accountability to God. Koheleth’s reference to the sinner’s doing evil “a hundred times” is to be understood as meaning “often” or “many times.” Despite his repeated offenses, he remains free from deserved punishment, enjoying a long life. (8:12)

While the sinner may have appeared to be prospering, Koheleth “knew” or “recognized” that it would turn out well for “those who fear God.” Their fear would be a wholesome, reverential awe for the Almighty, motivating them to do what is pleasing him. Because of manifesting such a wholesome fear, the reverential person would experience what is good. Unlike the sinner who risks punishment for his wrongdoing and therefore lives with a measure of apprehension, fearers of God are not troubled by such disquietude. From the standpoint of an inner sense of security by reason of possessing a clear conscience, the end result for godly individuals would be good. (8:12)

Contrasting the situation of those fearing God with that of the wicked, Koheleth continued, “And it will not be good for the wicked [person], and he will not lengthen his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God’s face.” Even though the wicked one may appear to get by with his evil deeds, he is always in danger of being brought to justice. Therefore, he can never feel secure. With an ever-present sense of uneasiness, the wicked one does not enjoy the good that is the possession of persons having an untroubled conscience. His wrongdoing is not a means for extending his “days” or lengthening his life. (8:13)

The expression “like a shadow” may be understood in three different ways. (1) The wicked one will not increase the number of the days of his life, days which are like a shadow, brief and fleeting. (2) He cannot extend his days like a shadow that gets longer toward evening. (3) Like a shadow which soon disappears, the wicked one will not live long. The basic thought, however, is the same — a sinful course does not result in attaining a longer life. This is because, as Koheleth added, because the wicked one does not “fear before God’s face.” The corrupt individual has no reverence for the Most High but acts as though God does not exist, disregarding the innate sense of right and whatever knowledge he may have of divine requirements as to conduct. Without any fear of God, the individual pursues a corrupt way of life that jeopardizes his welfare. (8:13)

Outward appearances do not always reveal whether a person is corrupt or upright. Koheleth called attention to this aspect as a “vanity that takes place on earth.” There are upright individuals who experience life as if they had

conducted themselves like the wicked, and wicked persons who fare well as if they had lived like the upright. Being a vanity that occurs on earth, it is an injustice for which flawed humans are responsible. Governmental and judicial corruption can lead to undeserved punishment being inflicted on the righteous, whereas wicked ones may continue to succeed in their schemes by means of bribery and flattery. Such wicked ones may even attain positions of prominence, while upright persons may be treated disrespectfully because, unlike the wicked, they do not use dishonorable means to advance themselves. The wicked thus are given the honor that is the just due of the righteous. (8:14)

Koheleth identified this inequitable situation as an example of vanity (“I said that this also [is] vanity”). This development made no sense, served no beneficial purpose, resulted in nothing that lasted and, therefore, was empty, meaningless, purposeless, or futile. (8:14)

As Koheleth noted, the manner in which a person is treated does not always depend on whether the individual’s conduct is upright or corrupt. This could cause one to brood about injustices and become frustrated and bitter. Koheleth, though, recommended that one should derive wholesome enjoyment from life, saying, “And I commended rejoicing, for man has no good under the sun except to eat and drink and enjoy himself, for this will go with him in his labor through the days of life that God has given him under the sun.” (8:15)

To Koheleth, “rejoicing,” enjoyment, gladness, or cheer was something deserving of commendation or praise. It was right for humans, earthlings, or mortals to experience gladness. In the realm of earthly affairs beneath the sun, humans experience or witness many uncertainties and injustices during their brief life. Hence, there is nothing better for them than to find pleasure in eating and drinking and to rejoice or to enjoy themselves to the extent possible. As Koheleth observed, eating, drinking, and rejoicing accompany the labor or wearying and exhausting toil that fills the days of one’s life. Since life comes from God, Koheleth could speak of the “days of life” on earth beneath the sun as having been given by God. (8:15)

Much of what happens in the realm of human affairs by God’s allowance is perplexing or incomprehensible and even troubling. Focusing on this point, Koheleth said, “When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the task that is performed on earth — for even by day and by night [a man] does not see sleep in his eyes.” (8:16)

In speaking of the “heart,” Koheleth may have meant his mind or his deep inner self. He gave the objective of coming to “know” wisdom (sound judgment or insight), or having it as a personal possession, his full attention. His whole being was involved. It was not a superficial effort. He likewise applied or directed his

“heart” in seeing or observing the “task,” business, or occupation that is performed on earth” (in the realm of human affairs). This reveals that Koheleth was very diligent, sparing no effort in his careful investigation of what occupies the time and attention of mortals. (8:16)

The statement about “sleep” could mean that humans are so completely occupied by laboring that there is no time for real rest. “I tried to understand all that happens on earth. I saw how busy people are, working day and night and hardly ever sleeping.” (NCV) “I applied my mind to acquire wisdom and to observe the tasks undertaken on earth, when mortal eyes are never closed in sleep day or night.” (REB) In view of the context, a more likely meaning is that the point about not sleeping relates to the man who seeks to find out or comprehend the “work of God.” Such a man’s endeavor appears to be depicted as all-consuming, occupying him day and night and not permitting him any repose. He would not “see” or experience sleep in the eyes — the organs that are covered by the eyelids during the customary periods of rest. (8:16)

A number of translations are explicit in linking the thought about not sleeping to the effort to find out the “work of God.” “When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to observe what is done on earth, I recognized that man is unable to find out all God’s work that is done under the sun, even though neither by day nor by night do his eyes find rest in sleep.” (NAB) “But even if a man does not allow himself sleep, he will never be able to comprehend what God does on this earth.” (*Aber selbst wenn sich der Mensch Tag und Nacht keinen Schlaf gönnt, wird er nie alles nachvollziehen können, was Gott auf dieser Erde tut.* [German, *Neues Leben*]) “What God does and lets happen in the world no man can fully grasp even if day and night he does not allow himself sleep.” (*Was Gott tut und auf der Welt geschehen lässt, kann der Mensch nicht vollständig begreifen, selbst wenn er sich Tag und Nacht keinen Schlaf gönnt.* (German, *Hoffnung für alle*)) “Then I recognized that, even if he does not allow sleep to his eyes by day and night, man cannot again discover the activity of God in all its fullness.” (*da sah ich ein, dass der Mensch, selbst wenn er seinen Augen bei Tag und Nacht keinen Schlaf gönnt, das Tun Gottes in seiner Ganzheit nicht wieder finden kann.* [German, *Einheitsübersetzung*]) Other translations convey a similar thought, but alter the text to represent Koheleth as the one who did not permit himself to sleep. “Day and night I went without sleep, trying to understand what goes on in this world.” (CEV)

Respecting the work of God, Koheleth commented, “And I saw all the work of God, that man is unable to find out the work that is done under the sun.” The “work of God” relates to what takes place in the earthly realm where humans conduct their affairs of life. This is evident from the reference to “the work that is done under the sun” — on the earth which is dependent upon the sun for light

and warmth. “All” does not embrace every aspect of God’s activity, but is limited to everything that Koheleth was able to see or observe among humans. Since the Almighty can exercise absolute control over every matter, anything that takes place by his allowance or toleration is included in his work. (8:17)

After his consideration of the “work of God” (all that takes place in the earthly sphere among humans by reason of God’s will, permission, or toleration), Koheleth concluded that no man, no earthling or mortal, is able to fathom or understand it. No human could devise or discover some system, formula, or set plan or procedure that might explain just what is to be expected in every situation. There simply is no way for one to predict accurately in every case what would take place and what bearing this would have on other developments. (8:17)

Regardless of the effort expended, the thoroughness of the investigation, and the astuteness of the researcher, the work of God will remain an unsolvable secret. Koheleth concluded, “However much man labors in searching, he will not find [out the work of God]. And even though the wise man says he knows, he cannot find [it out].” Extensive, exhausting searching will be to no avail. Even if one known for wisdom or extraordinary insight in solving perplexing problems of life were to say that he “knew” the work of God, apparently in the sense of coming close to a solution respecting it, he would not be able to comprehend it. Understanding God’s work, explaining it in terms of a specific formula or system, is beyond all humans, even the wisest. (8:17)

Ecclesiastes 9:1-18

Linking what he said previously with the word *ki* (“for”), Koheleth said, “For all this I gave to my heart, and to explain [*bur*] all this, that the righteous and the wise and their works [are] in God’s hand.” The words “for all this” probably relate to what Koheleth noted about man’s inability to comprehend the work of God. His giving this to his “heart” could mean that he really thought about it, making the matter the subject of his mind’s serious reflection. Or the giving to his heart could signify his truly having absorbed in his “heart,” or his inner self, the point about God’s work. In either case, that to which Koheleth had given or applied his “heart” (his mind or himself in his inmost self) became his own. (9:1)

There is a measure of uncertainty about the significance of the Hebrew word *bur*. The phrase that contains *bur* reads differently in the Septuagint (“and my heart saw [recognized or understood] all this”). The rendering of the Vulgate is, “All these things I considered in my heart, that I might carefully understand [them].” Modern translations vary in their renderings (“and I understood” [REB]; “and concluded” [NIV]; “examining it all” [NRSV]; “I ascertained all

this” [Tanakh]; “and recognized” [NAB]; “and experienced all this” [NJB]). Lexicographers have defined *bur* as meaning either “explain” or “examine.” If *bur* means “explain,” this could indicate that, even though God’s work proved to be incomprehensible, Koheleth could explain the truth that he had come to recognize, “The righteous and the wise and their works are in God’s hand.” From the standpoint of “examining,” the words could be understood to mean that Koheleth carefully investigated everything on which he focused his attention and then reached the conclusion about everything being under the control of God. (9:1)

The righteous are those whose conduct is upright. Their desire is to conform to the divine standard of what is good. Hence, they strive to preserve a clean conscience before God and fellow humans. Righteousness is not merely a refraining from doing what is wrong. It is also manifested by doing positive good, coming to the aid of those having genuine needs. (9:1; Psalm 15:2-5; Proverbs 24:11, 12; Ezekiel 18:15-17)

Wise persons are known for their sound judgment in the practical matters of life. They do not take needless risks. Unlike those who are foolhardy, the wise have a serious view of life, avoid rash words and actions, and think carefully about what they do and say so as not to injure others or bring trouble upon themselves. (9:1)

As to their persons and their activities, the righteous and the wise are in God’s hand, subject to his control or his allowance and toleration. What he may permit to befall them may not always be favorable. Neither their righteousness nor their wisdom can guarantee good results to themselves or from their works. Whatever they experience is dependent on God’s will or permission. So, their being in God’s hand along with their works indicates that they are fully dependent on him for everything. (9:1)

Koheleth’s next words are difficult to restrict to one specific meaning, as the context is not sufficiently precise. According to a literal reading of the Hebrew, he continued, “Even love, even hate, man does not know all [that is] before them [literally, ‘their faces’].” (9:1)

The Hebrew term for “before” may signify either what is past or what is yet ahead. Since death brings an end to all feelings and emotions that were previously expressed, earthlings do not know all the love and the hate that were manifest before they were born. “Be it love, be it hate, man understands nothing thereof. All of both lies before their time.” (*Sei es Liebe, sei es Hass, nichts davon erkennt der Mensch. Alles beides liegt vor ihrer Zeit.* [German, *Elberfelder Bibel*]) Likewise, whether they will experience love or hatred in the future is unknown to them. “Man does not know whether it will be love or

hatred; anything awaits him. (NASB) “People don’t know whether [to expect] love or hate. Everything lies ahead of them.” (HCSB) “No one knows if they will experience love or hate.” (NCV) Because Koheleth’s focus has been on man’s inability to fathom God’s work as it relates to the future, it appears preferable to view “before” as meaning yet ahead. (9:1)

As used in the Scriptures, the term “hate” does not always denote malice or intense hostility toward or a loathing of a person. At times, the word “hate” simply means to be loved to a lesser degree. (Genesis 29:31, 33; Deuteronomy 21:15, 16) Humans have no prior knowledge of the extent to which they may or may not be loved. (9:1)

In themselves, outward appearances do not reveal whether the individual is the object of God’s love or displeasure. A number of translations interpretively identify God as expressing either love or hate. “No one knows whether or not God will show them favor in this life.” (NLT) “But a man doesn’t know whether God will show favour to him.” (NIRV) It may be noted, however, that God’s law given through Moses revealed what attitudes, words, and actions either merited divine hatred or were divinely approved. Likely, then, the reference is not to God’s love or hate for the individual. What is unknown is whether the person will be the object of the love or hate of fellow humans. (9:1)

Among imperfect humans, love or hatred may be expressed without sound reasons or justification. These opposite emotions may be displayed in an arbitrary manner. Love may be shown for those who are most undeserving of it, whereas hatred may be expressed toward those who should be treated with compassion. Koheleth’s words, therefore, could mean that earthlings do not “know,” “understand,” or “comprehend” love or hate, the motivations and reasons for these emotions being incomprehensible. Just as the work of God cannot be fathomed, love and hate defy understanding. *The New Jerusalem Bible* reads, “We do not understand either love or hate.” (9:1)

There is a possibility that the words “love and hate” are not to be connected with the term “before,” eliminating any question as to whether the reference is to past or future time. In Hebrew, the consonants kaph (K) and beth (B) are very similar and have, at times, been confused by copyists. Hence, the opening expression of verse 2, “the all” (HKL) could be read as “vanity” (HBL), and this is the word found in the Septuagint. The Hebrew could be understood as follows: “Even love, even hate, man knows not. All before their faces [them] — vanity.” This is the meaning conveyed in many modern translations. “Whether it is love or hate one does not know. Everything that confronts them is vanity.” (NRSV) “But whether they will earn love or hatred they have no way of knowing. Everything that confronts them, everything is futile.” (9:1, REB)

Still other translations interpret the words as applying to those who express love or hate and not to those who are the objects of love or hate. “Yes, man does not even understand why he loves or hates. Everything has already been determined beforehand.” (*Ja, der Mensch versteht nicht einmal, warum er liebt oder hasst. Alles ist schon vorher festgelegt.* [German, *Hoffnung für alle*]) “I have thought everything over and have come to the understanding that also the wise and the upright are dependent on God in everything they do. They do not even know why they love or hate.” (*Ich habe über alles nachgedacht und bin zu der Einsicht gekommen, dass auch die Klugen und Rechtschaffenen in allem, was sie tun, von Gott abhängig sind. Nicht einmal, warum sie lieben oder hassen, wissen sie.* [German, *Gute Nachricht Bibel*]) (9:1)

The precise significance of Koheleth’s next words depends upon whether the first expression is to be understood as pertaining to “all” or to “vanity.” When the vowel pointing of the traditional Hebrew text is followed, the words may be read, “the all that to all.” This could mean that all things come to everyone alike. The connection to the words that follow would then be that, regardless of their moral condition, humans basically face the same things during the course of their lives. If, however, the focus is on “vanity” (as in the Septuagint [“Vanity [is] in everything”]), the point could be that, by reason of its temporary or fleeting nature, everything before or confronting humans is vanity, emptiness, futility or meaninglessness. (9:2)

Expanding on the thought that the moral condition of humans does not affect their eventual destiny or fate, Koheleth continued, “One fate to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; and to him who sacrifices and to him who does not sacrifice; as [it is to] the good one, so [it is to] the sinner; [to] him who swears as [to him] who fears an oath.” (9:2)

“Fate” is a rendering of the Hebrew *miqréh* and usually denotes a happening that is neither chosen nor controlled by the one affected. It is not a predetermined occurrence. In this context, the eventuality is the inevitable destiny of all humans — death. (9:2)

The righteous are those whose words and actions conform to the dictates of a clean conscience and whatever knowledge they have of divine law. Wicked persons, on the other hand, act corruptly and disregard the rights of others. They conduct themselves as though they had no conscience and no knowledge of any laws or principles. (9:2)

Although the opposite of “good” (“bad” or “evil”) does not appear in the Hebrew text, it is found in the Syriac, Septuagint, and Vulgate. Many modern translations, therefore, read, “the good and the evil” (NRSV) or “the good and the bad” (NAB). “The good” may also be called “righteous,” “just,” or

“upright.” What distinguishes them, however, is a willingness to go beyond what justice requires. Genuinely concerned about the welfare of others, the good are helpful and self-sacrificing givers. (9:2)

The clean could designate those who are either morally or ceremonially pure or undefiled. If the Hebrew reading “to the good and to the clean” is to be understood as a collective designation, the focus would seem to be on moral purity. This is because a person could be free from ceremonial defilement but not be good and, hence, not morally clean. On the other hand, the mention of sacrificing immediately thereafter could suggest that features of the Mosaic law are being highlighted and, therefore, the reference could be to ceremonial cleanness or uncleanness. (9:2)

According to the Mosaic law, there were both voluntary and obligatory sacrifices. (Leviticus 1:1-7:37) The one sacrificing would be the person who complied with the law when presenting both required and voluntary offerings. Unlike such a reverential worshiper, the one not sacrificing presented no offerings. (9:2)

In being the opposite of the good man, the sinner is one who habitually does what is bad. Such a person lives a life of sin, deviating from what is morally right and good. (9:2)

Up to this point, the commendable aspect has been named first. If this is also true regarding the “swearing,” the reference could be to a person who, in a judicial matter, takes an oath in God’s name. (Exodus 22:10, 11; Deuteronomy 6:13) The person fearing an oath could be one who did not want to give truthful testimony. Such a one would fear taking an oath that would obligate him to tell the truth. Since, however, many corrupt persons would not hesitate to lie under oath, it appears that the reference is to improper swearing. Likely, the one swearing would be doing so to a falsehood or in a rash or frivolous manner. The person who is afraid of an oath would then be one who shuns this kind of swearing. (9:2)

Again directing attention to the fate or eventuality common to all, Koheleth continued, “This [is] an evil among all that is done under the sun, that one fate [befalls] all.” The expression “an evil among all” may signify an “evil” or “bad” greater than any other, a calamity of the superlative degree. “Among all the things that happen under the sun, this is the worst.” (NAB) It is possible, however, that the reference simply is to an evil among other evils. “This is another evil among those occurring under the sun.” (NJB) Still another meaning may be that the evil makes its appearance among all earthly occurrences or that it is in them, affecting everything in the sphere of human activity. Identifying this “evil,” Koheleth said that there is one fate or one eventuality “to all.”

Without exception, all humans face the one unplanned and uncontrolled eventuality — death. (9:3)

As death comes to all regardless of their actions, this tends to have a corrupting effect on the conduct of people generally. Koheleth continued, “And also the heart of the sons of the man is full of bad, and madness [is] in their heart throughout their lives.” The “heart” or deep inner self of humans is inclined toward bad. Because of the inevitability of death for all (regardless of their moral condition), there seems to be no tangible incentive for controlling corrupt desires and passions. As a consequence, the “heart” or deep inner self is “full of bad,” giving rise to corrupt thoughts, words, and actions. “Madness” exists in the “heart” or the deep inner self of humans “throughout their lives.” The outward manifestation of this is their wayward conduct. It is irrational — not guided by sound judgment and contrary to what is right, decent, and fair. Finally, the life of reckless abandon comes to an abrupt end. As Koheleth expressed it, “and after that — to the dead.” (9:3)

In view of this gloomy outcome, Koheleth emphasized the value of life, saying, “But he who is joined to all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion.” Being “joined to all the living” would mean being alive, being counted as belonging to the collective whole of all those who are living. (9:4)

Only the person who is alive has hope. One facing unfavorable or distressing circumstances hopes for a change or an end to such. The laborer toils in the hope of being able to enjoy fruit from his activity. Hope is definitely a prominent element belonging to the realm of conscious existence and activity. At death, however, the capacity for hope ceases to exist. Therefore, as illustrated by a living dog and a dead lion, to be alive is better than to be dead. (9:4)

In Koheleth’s time, snarling, vicious, wild scavenger dogs were greatly despised. The term “dog” was used as an epithet for a contemptible person, or one of very low station. (1 Samuel 17:43; 2 Samuel 3:8; 16:9; 2 Kings 8:13) On the other hand, the lion was regarded as a symbol of regal authority and splendor. Yet, as Koheleth noted, a live dog was better off than a dead lion. Life alone makes activity and hope possible. (9:4)

Furthermore, conscious thought is the exclusive domain of the living. Koheleth continued, “For the living know that they will die, but the dead do not know anything, nor do they any longer have a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten.” Among the living alone, there is a painful awareness that life eventually will come to an end. They “know” or recognize that death is an inevitability. Their knowing that they will die is a sobering awareness and should prompt them to make good use of their days, deriving wholesome pleasure or enjoyment from life. (9:5)

At death, all capacity for thought ends. The dead know absolutely nothing. There is no reward or wage for them, as they can do nothing to gain such. Eventually, as new generations come into the world, even the memory of their once having existed as persons fades away. In most cases, no one even remembers the name of the deceased. From the standpoint of having vanished from the remembrance of the living, the dead also have no more reward or wages. (9:5)

Continuing the description of the condition of the dead, Koheleth observed, “Also their love, also their hate, also their envy have already perished, and they have no part forever in all that is done under the sun.” Strong emotions have ceased in the case of the dead. All expressions of warmth, compassion, and deep affection belong to the past. Any feelings of malice, hostility, or loathing have come to their end. All envy or jealousy (the resentment of what others have that is desired for self) has perished. “Forever” (*‘ohlám*), or for time that has no limit, the dead have no “part” or “share” in any activity taking place in the earthly realm beneath the sun. (9:6)

In view of the inevitability of death, Koheleth advised that one should derive wholesome enjoyment from life, saying, “Go, eat your bread with rejoicing and drink your wine with a good heart.” As the basic staple, bread is synonymous with food. Partaking of food was to be pleasurable or accompanied by “rejoicing,” “gladness,” or “cheer.” The expression “good heart” signifies that the deep inner self should reflect a “good” or “joyful” spirit. Evidently this implies that the use of wine should be moderate, as excess would dull the senses and prevent proper enjoyment. (9:7)

Adding the reason for such wholesome enjoyment of food and drink, Koheleth continued, “For already God is pleased with your works.” The fact that the Most High has made it possible for humans to enjoy food and drink (the fruit from their labor) indicates that their doing so in a proper way has his approval. God is pleased with the individual’s works, as the products therefrom (food and drink) are being used in harmony with his will. (9:7)

Continuing the thought of maintaining a joyful spirit, Koheleth observed, “At all times let your garments be white and oil not be lacking on your head.” Garments should not customarily be dingy or dirty, but bright and clean, “freshly washed” (Tanakh). Since eating and drinking (mentioned earlier) are a daily occurrence, it seems less likely that the reference is to wearing white garments just on festive occasions. Dirty garments were representative of mourning (2 Samuel 19:24), whereas clean clothes signified joy or that the period of mourning had ended. (2 Samuel 12:20) The oil doubtless would be olive oil, mixed with a fragrant substance. In a hot climate, the application of oil was refreshing. It protected the exposed areas of the skin from excessive drying and cracking on account of the

sun's intense rays. Refraining from applying oil to the body was a sign of grief, and the use of oil a symbol of joy. (9:8; Matthew 6:17, 18)

Calling attention to another source of delight, Koheleth said, "See life with the woman [*'ishshah*] whom you love all the days of the life of your vanity." The Hebrew term *'ishshah* also designates a "wife," and this is the apparent meaning here. It is highly unlikely that the reference would be to any woman whom a man might come to love. The Mosaic law contained specific commands that imposed penalties for any irresponsible, promiscuous life style (Exodus 22:16, 17; Deuteronomy 22:28, 29), and prescribed capital punishment for adultery. (Deuteronomy 22:22-27) It is inconceivable that Koheleth would have given admonition that contradicted the Mosaic law. (9:9)

The expression "see life" evidently means to experience life as a married man and to find pleasure in it. At a time when polygamy existed among the Isarelites, the admonition suggests an appreciation for monogamy. The recommendation is to enjoy life with one wife, the one who is loved exclusively. (9:9)

Because the days of life are few and pass quickly, Koheleth spoke of them as "days of the life of your vanity." As it is so very short and nothing can be accomplished that has permanent value, life seems futile, empty, meaningless, or purposeless. (9:9)

Since God has made life possible, Koheleth said respecting the "days of life," "which he gave you under the sun." It is beneath the sun, in the earthly realm, that these days are spent. (9:9)

Again emphasizing the appropriateness of wholesome enjoyment of the fruit of labor, Koheleth continued, "for that is your part in life and from your labor which you labor under the sun." The Hebrew term for "labor" (*'amál*) conveys the thought of painful, wearisome, burdensome, or exhausting toil. There appears to be an emphasis on the repetitious nature of the toil — "labor which you labor." It is a ceaseless toiling day after day, and year after year. During one's futile life of toiling, the lot or share that offers something better is getting enjoyment from food and drink, sharing companionship with a wife who is loved, and experiencing a sense of well-being and refreshment (as made possible by wearing clean garments and applying oil on one's body). Koheleth's words "under the sun" focus on the earthly realm where humans live and toil. (9:9)

In view of the inevitability that the short life of humans ends in death, Koheleth recommended, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do [it] with your might, for [there is] no work, or thought, or knowledge, or wisdom in Sheol, [the place] to which you are going." Although previously he had advised that one should get enjoyment from life and the fruit of labor, this was not to be a life filled with

idle pleasure. Koheleth's counsel is to keep the "hand" busy in work, not letting essentials lie unattended. Whenever something needs to be done, the "hand" or the faculties needed to accomplish it, should be employed. This was to be no halfhearted effort in doing work. As Koheleth noted, it was to be accomplished with one's "might," or with all the strength that one could reasonably muster. (9:10)

The reason for being diligent and energetic in work is that the time comes when absolutely nothing can be done. In Sheol, the realm of the dead, all physical and mental activity is nonexistent. No "work" or "doing" of any kind occurs in the final resting place to which all the living are heading. Accomplishment requires planning, but all capacity for thought ceases at death and is not to be found in Sheol. Knowledge, a fund of factual information without which one cannot do a single thing, is not in evidence there. Wisdom, skill, or the ability to use knowledge to a successful end in the practical matters of life, does not exist in the abode of the dead. (9:10)

While observing what takes places "under the sun," in the earthly realm of human affairs, Koheleth noticed that there were many uncertainties. Before giving examples, he says, "I returned and saw under the sun." His "returning" may mean that after the matter first drew his attention, he was moved to give it more careful consideration. On the other hand, the expression "I returned" may simply introduce the new subject and, therefore, denote that Koheleth focused on something else. Commenting on what he "saw," "observed," or came to recognize, he continued, "not to the swift — the race, and not to the mighty — the battle, and not even to the wise — bread, and not even to the understanding — riches, and not even to the knowledgeable ones — the favor." (9:11)

The fastest runner may stumble, losing the race. A strong, well-equipped army may suffer defeat at the hands of inferior forces, perhaps because of unfamiliarity with the terrain or adverse weather conditions. The wise, those with insight in practical matters of life, may not be valued for their abilities. They may become objects of hostility and be deprived of their means of making a living, thus finding themselves without "bread" or food. The understanding ones, the intelligent, or those having perception in sound management may be prevented from using their abilities and come to be numbered among the poor. Persons having a fund of valuable knowledge may be regarded with suspicion by superiors and incur their hatred. Despite the great value of what they know, they come to be in disfavor. (9:11)

Explaining why talents and abilities provide no guarantees respecting a favorable outcome, Koheleth said, "for time and chance befall them all." The Hebrew term for "time" (*'eth*), in this case, denotes a time during which things happen that are beyond the control of the one affected. Likewise, the Hebrew

word for “chance” or “occurrence” (*péga*) is descriptive of a circumstance, happening, or encounter that is unexpected or unforeseen. (9:11)

Illustrating his point, Koheleth continued “For man also does not know his time; like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so [are] the sons of man snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.” Humans simply do not know what lies ahead of them. The time (*‘eth*) could denote any time of calamity or, in view of what follows, the time of death. Suddenly and without warning, misfortune or death can befall humans. The experience of people is comparable to what happens to fish that are caught in a net or birds that are trapped. Koheleth called the net an “evil” one because it results in bad or injury (death) to the fish that are caught. All humans are bound to encounter an “evil time,” one that signifies calamity or misfortune to the person affected. Like other “evils,” the inescapable one, death, befalls humans suddenly. Thus, in a time that spells calamity for them, they find themselves quickly and unexpectedly snared or caught. (9:12)

In the realm of human affairs, matters may turn out very differently than might be expected. Koheleth called attention to the effect one notable case of this had on him, saying, “Also this I saw [as] wisdom under the sun, and great it [was] to me.” His observation involved an example of wisdom, one that occurred beneath the sun, or in the realm of human affairs on earth. In referring to this case of wisdom as something “great,” Koheleth may have meant that it made a deep impression on him or that he found it to be especially noteworthy. (9:13)

Proceeding with the particulars, Koheleth said, “A small city — and few men in it. And against it a great king came and encircled it and built great siegeworks against it.” Being a small or insignificant place, the city had few men who could defend it and prevent its capture. The “great” king was evidently a powerful monarch who became famous and gained extensive dominion by waging successful warfare. Encircled by the king’s forces, the inhabitants of the city had little hope of escape. The “great” or “huge” siegeworks could have included ramps. On these ramps or inclined planes, battering rams and other siege equipment could have been used for breaking down the city gate and the walls. (9:14)

Whereas the city appeared to be doomed, the presence of a wise man saved the place. Koheleth continued, “And there was found in it a poor wise man and, by his wisdom, he saved the city, and no man remembered that poor man.” (9:15)

The nature of the poor man’s plan for saving the city or how he introduced it is not discussed. Possibly it involved action against one who had offended the conquering king (2 Samuel 20:15–22), use of what was available to stop the

monarch (Judges 9:51-55), or another means for the city's inhabitants to escape conquest. (9:15)

Once the danger had passed, however, the poor man was not honored. Lacking prestige or prominence, he was not remembered for the important service he had performed. No one felt indebted to him. (9:15)

Evidently because Koheleth afterward said that the words of the poor "are not heard," the Tanakh presents a different view of the situation. "Present in the city was a poor wise man who might have saved it with his wisdom, but nobody thought of that poor man." When regarded as a general principle, however, the observation that the words of the poor "are not heard" would not contradict the example given by Koheleth. (9:15, 16)

Drawing a conclusion from the example he had set forth, Koheleth continued, "And I said, Wisdom [is] better than might, and the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard." In the case to which Koheleth referred, the poor man's wisdom proved to be superior to the military might and siegeworks of the great king, resulting in the deliverance of the insignificant city. Nevertheless, without a position of influence or authority, a person, though wise, will usually be ignored. People tend to look down on the poor, never considering that they may possess real insight. The poor man's wisdom is despised, regarded as having no value. Perhaps, in an emergency, when all else fails, the poor man's wisdom may be acted upon. That, however, would be an exception. Usually, the poor man's wisdom would not be "heard," listened to, or heeded. (9:16)

Commenting on the manner in which the words of the wise are conveyed, Koheleth noted, "The words of the wise are heard in rest more than the cry of one who rules among fools." The wise are persons who possess sound judgment and, therefore, their words provide sensible guidelines and solutions to perplexing problems. Because what they say stands on its own merit, the wise do not resort to bluster. Their words are "heard" in "rest" or "calmness," being spoken in a calm and quiet manner. (9:17)

The calm or quiet expressions of the wise contrast sharply with the "cry," "shout," or "scream" of one dominating among fools, among persons whose way of life is morally corrupt and who manifest a crowd mentality in the pursuit of unworthy ends. Being "among" such persons, the one ruling is likewise morally flawed. He shouts, uses rabble-rousing means, or barks commands to achieve his aims. (9:17)

"Among fools" may also signify "in the manner of fools," and this agrees with the Septuagint rendering, "in senseless things" or "in follies." Whether a fool

exercising authority among fools, or a ruler screaming in the manner of fools, the contrast with the quiet or calm words of the wise is the same. (9:17)

In relation to “heard,” the expression “than” (*min*) may be understood in a number of ways. (1) The preference should be given to “hearing,” “listening to,” or “heeding” the words of the wise. (2) It is more likely that the quiet words of the wise will find listening ears than that the screaming of one trying to direct fools will be heeded. (3) The calm words of the wise will be heard above the cry of one dominating fools. These basic meanings are reflected in the renderings of various translations. “The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouting of a ruler among fools.” (NRSV) “Words spoken softly by wise men are heeded sooner than those shouted by a lord in folly.” (Tanakh) “The calm words of the wise make themselves heard above the shouts of someone commanding an army of fools.” (NJB) “The words of the wise in rest are heard above the shout of those wielding authority in senseless things.” (9:17, LXX)

Having earlier illustrated the power of wisdom, Koheleth concluded, “Wisdom [is] better than weapons of war, and one sinner ruins much good.” The poor man’s wisdom proved to be superior to the weapons of the powerful king and his well-equipped army, resulting in the city’s being saved. While weapons are designed to bring ruin, wisdom or sage advice, when heeded, can result in good. Both the power and the results from wisdom are better than weaponry. (9:18)

One sinner, a person who consistently and deliberately misses the mark of uprightness in attitude, words, and actions, can undo much good. By appealing to the corrupt leanings of the masses and ridiculing what is right and just, the sinner may sway the majority. As a result, good plans may be frustrated, resources may be squandered, and energies may be wasted. If the sinner succeeds in gaining a position of authority, corrupt, oppressive rulership and warfare can plunge an entire nation into ruin. (9:18)

In a footnote, *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* presents “sin” (*chet*), not “sinner” as the intended word. A number of modern translations follow this meaning in their renderings (“one mistake” [REB]; “a single sin” [NJB]; “a single error” [Tanakh]). Just one sin can wreck much good. Whether regarded from the standpoint of the sin itself or the person of the sinner, the injurious effect on good is still the same. (9:18)

Ecclesiastes 10:1-20

Probably to show how easily a good reputation can be ruined, Koheleth introduced the proverbial saying, “Dead flies cause the perfumer’s ointment to stink, to bubble up [*yábia*].” (10:1)

The literal reading “flies of death” suggests that the flies cause death or are poisonous, which is the thought the rendering of the Septuagint conveys (“deadly flies” or “death-dealing flies”). It appears preferable, however, to regard the Hebrew as meaning “dead flies,” as this agrees better with the words about ruining the oil or the ointment. When a fly lands on the perfumer’s fragrant mixture, it is unable to free itself and soon dies. As the dead fly decays, the ointment begins to stink. (10:1)

There is a measure of uncertainty about the word *yábia* that appears in the Hebrew text. Commonly considered to be a form of *navá‘*, the word would basically denote to “gush forth,” “flow,” or “bubble up.” This could refer to the formation of bubbles on the surface of the ointment — an evidence of the fermentation process. The translator of the Septuagint, though, used a word drawn from *skeuós* (“vessel”) and which term apparently means the “preparation [in a vessel].” Possibly the rendering arose when the translator took the initial letter of the Hebrew word to be gimel (G), not yod (Y), which would have changed the meaning of the Hebrew word to “cup.” (10:1)

Koheleth continued, “weightier than wisdom, than honor — a little foolishness.” The Hebrew term *yaqár*, which means “rare,” “precious,” or “costly,” is probably drawn from a root that signifies “to be heavy.” According to the root meaning of the term, this would denote that a little foolishness is “weightier” or “outweighs” wisdom and honor. This is the case because a little foolishness (a violent outburst of wrath, a serious indiscretion in conduct with the opposite sex, overindulgence in drink, or any other moral impropriety) can undo or ruin the reputation of a wise person who has been highly respected, esteemed or honored. (10:1)

There is a possibility, though, that the meaning of “precious” can be preserved. The reference would then be to the bad effect of a little foolishness, for it outstrips the value of wisdom and honor. From the standpoint of diminishing the preciousness of wisdom and honor, senselessness could be spoken of as being more “precious.” “A little folly can make wisdom lose its worth.” (REB) The Septuagint reading reflects the meaning “precious” but expresses a thought that differs from the Hebrew text. “A little wisdom is more precious than the splendor [from] great senselessness.” (10:1)

Whether the Hebrew word is understood as signifying “to outweigh” or “to be rare, precious, or costly,” the basic sense of the proverbial saying remains the same. Just as a little dead fly can ruin an ointment mixture, wisdom and honor cannot escape the damaging effect of a little foolishness or a moral wrong. Just one serious moral slip can wreck a reputation for wisdom and deprive a person of honor or dignity. (10:1)

Koheleth's words may also be understood to mean that folly can outweigh or overrule wisdom. Foolishness may be given a hearing ear, resulting in the rejection of wise guidance. King Rehoboam, for example, foolishly turned a deaf ear to the wise counsel of older, experienced men, preferring to follow the senseless advice of younger men. (1 Kings 12:3-16) While a little foolishness can undo what has been achieved or could be accomplished by the wise, it is more likely (in view of the previous words about the ointment) that the main thought is that a wise person can ruin his good reputation by engaging in a little foolishness. (10:1)

Drawing a contrast between the wise person and the fool, Koheleth observed, "The wise one's heart [is] at his right, and the fool's heart [is] at his left." In the case of the wise person, the "heart" or the faculty for understanding, reasoning, and motivation occupies the proper place (the right side) and, therefore, inclines the individual to follow a course of moral rectitude. The fool, however, does not have his "heart" in the right place, the "left" being representative of what is wrong, unacceptable, or defective. This signifies that the fool's understanding, reasoning, moral sense, and motivation depart from what is upright. In attitude, word, and action, he is inclined to pursue a path that is morally wrong. (10:2)

Regarding the fool, Koheleth continued, "And also, in the way that the fool treads, his heart is lacking, and he says to all, he [is] a fool." Because the fool's course is reckless, contrary to sound judgment and moral uprightness, he is described as having no heart. In this case, "heart" likely denotes "understanding," particularly with reference to moral perception. By his conduct, he reveals to all that he is a fool, a person with a serious moral defect. A number of translations make this explicit. "Everyone remarks, 'How silly he is!'" (NJB) "The fool lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is." (NIV) "The fool shows no sense and reveals to everyone how foolish he is." (REB) "And he lets everybody know he is a fool." (10:3, Tanakh)

There is a possibility, though, that Koheleth's words signify that the fool calls all others foolish. "About everyone else he has said, He is stupid." (*er von jedem andern gesagt hat: Er ist dumm.* [German, *Einheitsübersetzung*]) The fool may regard the serious, sensible view of life that others have as preventing what he imagines to be enjoyment. Determined to follow his irresponsible, reckless, and corrupt way of life, he would be quick to label as a fool anyone who would attempt to correct him. (10:3)

Since the Hebrew word for "all" (*kol*) can denote either "everyone" or "everything," the thought could also relate to how the fool, from his distorted perspective, regards things. "In his lack of understanding he calls everything foolish." (10:3, NAB)

Earlier, Koheleth provided admonition regarding submission to a monarch (8:2-6). He returned to this subject, giving the following advice when one has angered a person in authority: “If the spirit of the ruler is aroused against you, do not leave your place, for calmness [*marpé*] quiets great offenses.” (10:4)

In this case, the Hebrew term *rúach* (“spirit”) denotes “temper” and is often rendered “anger” (NAB, NIV, NJB, NRSV, REB) or “wrath” (Tanakh). Koheleth recommended that one avoid being hasty in relinquishing a position or post on account of a superior’s displeasure. Even when facing what appears to be unjustified wrath, there is a better way to deal with the situation than to give up one’s place. By maintaining a calm spirit, the individual may find that the ruler’s anger will subside. As Koheleth noted, “calmness quiets great offenses.” The Hebrew word *marpé* conveys the sense of “calmness,” “gentleness,” or “soothing.” When a subject manifests a calm, submissive spirit, the ruler may not inflict the severest penalty for what he considers to be great offenses. This is because calmness does not fuel anger but has a quieting effect on the wrathful person. Thus the great offenses are not magnified and do not lead to the kind of punishment that would customarily be meted out if the ruler’s anger had continued or intensified. (10:4)

In governmental administration, Koheleth observed that persons selected for responsible posts may be seriously lacking in the essential qualifications. He spoke of this as an “evil” he had “seen” or observed “under the sun” (on earth in the realm of human affairs). It is an evil because it works to the injury of the ruler’s subjects and contributes to dissatisfaction with his administration of governmental affairs. Koheleth also referred to the “evil” as a mistake coming from the ruler’s “presence” (literally, “face”) and, hence, an error for which the person exercising authority is responsible. (10:5)

Pointing to the specific mistake, Koheleth continued, “Foolishness is given many high [positions], and the rich sit in low [position].” Persons lacking the ability to administer affairs righteously, impartially, and wisely are entrusted with authority. Foolishness is exalted. The “rich” evidently are not to be understood as meaning all wealthy persons. Among the rich may also be found morally corrupt persons who lack good judgment. Therefore, the “rich” apparently are noble persons who have demonstrated ability to manage affairs wisely. Their way of life gives evidence that they are capable of handling governing responsibilities. Because incompetent persons are exalted to high office, the noble ones find themselves disrespected and having a low standing. (10:6)

Further emphasizing the contrast, Koheleth continued, “I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking on the earth like slaves.” It was viewed as disrespectful for a slave to ride on any animal while the master was walking. He

would dismount when encountering the master who happened to be on foot. (Compare Genesis 24:63-65.) The exalting of slaves would, therefore, have been a serious attack on the existing social order. Hence, Koheleth's reference to "slaves" apparently is to be understood as meaning persons who had the spirit of slaves (in the negative sense of the expression). Owned, not granted the opportunity to make important choices, and forced to work in the accomplishment of laborious, unpleasant tasks, slaves did not acquire experience in governing others or managing affairs. The institution of slavery also had a demoralizing effect on many. Hence, to elevate persons with a slavelike disposition, seating them on horses, would have meant entrusting high offices to persons who were the least qualified. (10:7)

"Princes," on the other hand, designated noble persons with the needed qualifications and experience to govern. Though deserving of high office, they were not accorded dignity or respect but found themselves walking on the ground as if they were slaves. (10:7)

Incompetent persons, however, are in a precarious situation. Their poor judgment, coupled with abuse of authority, may become so obvious that it leads to their downfall, perhaps even a swift removal by the very one who exalted them. Koheleth next introduced a number of proverbial sayings that call attention to inherent hazards, and these sayings may serve to illustrate the dangerous situation of high officials who are unqualified for their position. If, though, the sayings are to be linked to the earlier admonition about dealing with a ruler's anger, they may be understood as cautions and warnings about rising up against the established order.

"One who digs a pit will fall into it." An open pit constitutes a serious hazard. According to the Mosaic law, the person who, after excavating it, left the pit uncovered was held liable for the death of any domestic animal that might fall into it. (Exodus 21:33, 34). By leaving the pit open and then failing to exercise due caution, the one who dug the pit could also fall into it. Similarly, the individual who tries to trap others, plotting against them as if digging a pit for them, may actually get caught by his own scheme. (10:8)

"He who breaks through a wall — a serpent will bite him." This kind of "wall" likely was one built of rough field stones and served as a protective fence. It would not be uncommon for snakes to slither between the stones of such a wall. Accordingly, the person (likely a thief) who broke through a stone wall could get bitten by a serpent. (10:8)

"He who quarries stones will be hurt by them; he who splits wood will be endangered by [it]." Quarrying and chopping are attended by a measure of risk.

The implement used and the result from the activities can endanger life and limb, requiring the exercise of caution to avoid injury. (10:9)

The next proverbial saying emphasizes the importance of using good sense. “If the iron is blunt, and one does not whet the edges [literally, ‘faces’], then one must put forth [more] strength, and wisdom [is] an advantage for bringing success.” The “iron” evidently refers to an ax used for chopping. A dull ax will require the woodchopper to exert much greater effort than would have been needed for chopping with a sharp tool. What could be done easily by using good sense (whetting the cutting edges or sharpening the ax) is done the hard way — ineffectively and inefficiently. Wisdom, common sense, or skill (manifest in preparing the implement for the job to be done) is revealed to be advantageous. Applied knowledge and skill lead to the successful outcome of an undertaking. (10:10)

The mere possession of knowledge or skill, however, does not guarantee success. Koheleth said, “If the serpent bites without [any] charming, then no advantage [exists] for the owner of the tongue.” There is no benefit in a person’s knowing how to charm a serpent if he is bitten before he is able to use his ability. The expression “owner of the tongue” apparently designates the charmer, the person who has a tongue capable of charming. (10:11)

Contrasting the words of a wise person and those of a fool, Koheleth noted, “The words of a sage’s mouth [are] gracious, and the lips of a fool swallow him.” The Hebrew term (*chen*), rendered “gracious,” conveys the sense of “agreeable,” “pleasing,” or “gaining favor.” A wise man’s expressions are pleasurable, because his manner of speaking is pleasant and his words impart thoughts of real value. What proceeds from his mouth may rightly be described as “gracious,” “agreeable,” or “pleasing.” Moreover, unlike the worthless sayings of a fool, a wise person’s words would usually gain a favourable response. A number of modern translations convey this sense in their renderings. “Words from the wise man’s mouth win favor.” (NAB) “A wise man’s talk brings him favor.” (10:12, Tanakh)

Whatever passes the lips of a fool, a person having a serious moral flaw, is neither gracious nor pleasing. The manner is repulsive, and the content is worthless or destructive. Stemming from the corrupt inner self, the words of the fool are really his undoing, exposing him for what he is and finding an unfavorable response. The “lips,” or the words that are a product of the lips, “swallow,” “consume,” or destroy the fool, making him the object of reproach. According to the Septuagint, the fool’s lips “sink” or “drown” him as if he were plunged into the sea. (10:12)

Focusing on the words of the fool, Koheleth continued, “The start of the words of his mouth [is] foolishness, and the end of his mouth [is] evil madness.” Right from the beginning of his speaking, the words of a fool are senseless, imparting nothing of value. As the morally corrupt person keeps on talking, his expressions progressively deteriorate. In the end, what comes out of his mouth is sheer “madness.” The expressions made are irrational, comparable to the rambling or raving of a person devoid of his senses. But the nonsensical words of the fool are not harmless chatter. The end or finish of what comes out of his mouth is “evil madness.” This may be understood to mean that it is “malicious,” “wicked,” “injurious,” “mischief run mad” (REB), or “treacherous folly” (NJB). It may also be that “evil madness” denotes senselessness that leads to calamity or disaster for the fool (“disastrous madness,” Tanakh). The “stupid chatter ends with disaster.” (10:13, CEV)

The fool simply does not know when to stop speaking. Though morally flawed and devoid of discernment, he keeps on talking. As Koheleth observed, “and the fool multiplies words.” Without giving any consideration to the possible and probable consequences of his words, he recklessly and thoughtlessly rambles on and on, spewing out utter nonsense. Although knowing nothing and having a twisted view of what is fitting and upright, he is an authority on everything. (10:14)

The fool is completely and deliberately blind as respects his limitations. This appears to be the implied thought behind Koheleth’s next words, “No man knows what is to be. And what will be after him, who can tell him?” No human knows exactly what will come to be or will take place in the future. Among mortals, no one can authoritatively and accurately say what shall come to be “after” a man, either after him in time or after a man’s death. By implication, the fool, however, believes that he can do what no human can. His many words and his recklessly ignoring dangers and warnings reveal this all-knowing attitude. (10:14)

Even in his toiling, the fool does not use common sense. Koheleth observed, “The labour of the fool wearies him, inasmuch as he does not know [how] to go to the city.” Imagining that he knows best, the fool stubbornly disregards the good suggestions, advice, and example of others. He persists in doing things ineffectively and inefficiently, exhausting himself in toil that could be accomplished with greater ease and less expenditure of effort. His manner of labouring to the point of weariness is comparable to a person’s vainly trying to get to a city by roads other than the right one. Accordingly, the fool is described as one who does not know or recognize the way to the city, which would be to follow the main thoroughfare that leads to it. He misses the obvious, wearing himself out needlessly. (10:15)

When persons lacking sound judgment occupy the highest offices, this leads to the ruin of the entire country. Regarding this, Koheleth noted, “Woe to you, O land, when your king is a boy and your princes eat in the morning.” (10:16)

The rendering “woe” (as expressing how disastrous it is) has the support of the Septuagint (*ouai*) and is found in most translations. In Hebrew, however, the word *'ey* could denote “why?” or “to what purpose?” If this, rather than “woe” is meant, Koheleth would be posing the question, as to what or how it will be for a land with the kind of king and princes that are described. The implication would be that the situation is too distressing to contemplate. (10:16)

For the king to be a “boy” would mean that he reflected the inexperience and poor judgment commonly associated with youth. He would have lacked the stature and ability to be a desirable, qualified ruler. The other high officials would make matters worse. Instead of providing sound advice and being diligent in the proper administration of the affairs of state, they would begin eating in the morning. This inappropriate eating would be self-indulgent feasting. An incompetent king surrounded by inept, pleasure-seeking princes and counselors would soon lead a country into economic ruin, if not also tremendous loss of life and devastation of the land from involvement in senseless warring. (10:16)

Focusing on good government, Koheleth observed, “Fortunate [are] you, O land, when your king [is] a son of nobles, and your princes eat at the proper time, for strength and not for drinking.” A land or country blessed with wise rulers enjoys stability, security, and prosperity. Rightly, Koheleth pronounced a land “fortunate” or in a state of well-being when its king and princes conducted themselves as befitted their high station. (10:17)

Instead of having the limited discernment and experience of a mere youth, the king would have the appropriate bearing and sound judgment. Being a “son of nobles,” the monarch would himself be noble, the possessor of dignity by reason of his just and wise handling of the weighty matters of state. (10:17)

The princes or officials and counsellors in the realm would be genuinely interested in fulfilling their important duties. They would not indulge their appetites in feasting when it was time to care for their responsibilities. They would recognize when it was “time” to eat. The Hebrew word for “time” (*'eth*), in this case, denotes a “fit,” “appropriate,” or “proper” time. When it is the proper time for eating, they would do so in moderation, taking in sufficient sustenance to restore their energies. They would eat “for strength,” that is, to have the needed energy to fulfill their governmental responsibilities. The princes would not give themselves up to self-indulgent revelry. Koheleth specifically noted that the “eating” is “not for drinking.” They would not allow their senses to be dulled by excesses in food and drink. The Septuagint makes no reference

to drinking in the case of the princes, but says, “They will not be ashamed.” (10:17)

Having highlighted the advantage of a country’s having good rulers, Koheleth introduced a proverbial saying about the problems resulting from the neglect of essential work or duties. “Through slothfulness, the roofing sinks; and through lowering of the hands, the house leaks.” (10:18)

The Hebrew term conveying the idea of “slothfulness,” “laziness,” or “indolence” is a dual form of *‘atsláh*. It can, therefore, be understood to mean “great,” “extreme,” or “excessive” laziness. (10:18)

When essential maintenance and repair are neglected, a house will soon come to be in a dilapidated state. The flat roofs of ancient homes were supported by an arrangement of beams and rafters. Beams extended from one wall to the other, and rafters were positioned across the beams. Next came a layer of reeds and branches that was covered with soil. A thick plaster of clay or clay and lime completed the roof. Without upkeep, such a roof would be to “sink” or “sag.” (10:18)

The Hebrew word *meqaréh*, often rendered “roof” or “rafter,” can designate the “beam work.” Likely, however, the expression refers to the “roofing.” Rather than the beams, the roofing, on account of the owner’s “great laziness,” would sink or sag from lack of maintenance. (10:18)

To accomplish something, the hands must be raised and not dropped to the sides of the body. Lowered hands are idle hands. Before the commencement of the autumn rains, roofs needed to be repaired and rolled smooth. For one to neglect this, leaving the hands idle, would mean having a house that lets in the rain. (10:18)

The next proverbial saying also appears to emphasize the importance of industriousness. Koheleth continued, “For laughter, they make bread, and wine cheers life, and silver answers everything.” (10:19)

As the basic staple, “bread” is synonymous with food. The making of bread, appears to denote the preparing of a meal. Since partaking of food can be enjoyable or pleasurable, Koheleth spoke of preparing “bread” or food for “laughter” or enjoyment. “The table has its pleasures.” (REB) “Eating and drinking make you feel happy.” (10:19, CEV)

Because of linking the expression “they make bread” with the self-indulgent princes (verse 16), the Tanakh renders the phrase, “They make a banquet for revelry.” Taking the expression “they make bread” in a general sense, however,

appears to be preferable, as there is no clear reference to the princes in the words themselves. (10:19)

Though Koheleth's observation that "wine cheers life" has also been regarded as applying to the drinking of the princes, it seems more likely that the effect of wine on the one drinking is meant. Alcohol affects the central nervous system and can put the individual in a cheerful mood. So the reference appears to be to the temporary pleasurable sensation from drinking wine in moderation. A similar thought is found in Psalm 104:15, "Wine to cheer man's heart." (10:19)

Silver was the common medium of exchange. Before money was coined, the individual, when making a purchase, would weigh out the agreed-upon amount of silver. It could be said that the self-indulgent princes had the needed silver to obtain food and drink. Silver "answered" their desires for pleasure. (10:19)

The entire proverbial saying, though, appears to be expressed in more general terms. "Silver" answered every need or desire that required the payment of a price, making it possible to obtain necessities and luxuries. The implied thought may be that the industrious worker will have enough silver to procure food, wine, and whatever else contributes to the enjoyment of life. (10:19)

Having specifically addressed the matter of poor rulership, Koheleth concluded with a caution about voicing complaint about persons in high station. "Also do not curse a king in your thought. And do not curse the rich in your bedrooms, for a bird of the heavens will carry the voice, and a winged creature may tell the matter." (10:20)

The Hebrew word *qalál*, translated "curse," literally means "to be light," that is, not heavy. It refers to speaking evil or ill of someone, in the sense that the individual is made light of ("do not speak ill" [REB], "do not make light of" [NAB], and "do not revile" [NIV]). (10:20)

Regarding the Hebrew expression appearing in the Hebrew text, (*bemadda'aka* [be, "in," and *maddá'*, "thought"]), a footnote in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* presents *bematstsa'aka* as what is intended. The Hebrew word *matstsa'*, defined as "bed" or "couch," is apparently drawn from the root *yatsá'*, meaning "to spread out." Accordingly, the expression *bematstsa'aka* could denote "in the place for spreading out to sleep," that is, in the bedroom. Most translations, however, do not adopt the emended Hebrew reading. An exception is the *Revised English Bible*, which reads, "when you are at rest." (10:20)

Both the Septuagint and the Vulgate support the rendering "thought." The Septuagint employs *syneídesis* ("conscience" or "consciousness") and the Vulgate, *cogitatio* ("thought"). When a person does not allow himself to speak

ill of a ruler even in thought, he is far less likely to make light of that one in a place where he could be overheard. (10:20)

The “rich man” designates a member of the ruling class. This is evident from the use of the expression in parallel with the words about the king. (10:20)

In Hebrew, the word for “room” (*chédher*) designates an innermost room, as does the Greek term *tamieíon* found in the Septuagint. The kind of innermost room is further described by the expression *mishkáv*, which may be defined as a “lying down” or “bed.” Accordingly, Koheleth advised against calling down evil on a ruler even in private bedrooms or bedchambers, where one would not think about the possibility of ever being overheard. (10:20)

As Koheleth observed, the matter could become known in a most unusual or unexpected way, as if a flying creature (‘*ohph*, “bird” [also, “insect”]) picked up the words and carried them where one would never want them to be heard. Though voiced in private, the injudicious grumbling or complaining would result in bringing untold trouble on oneself. Even in modern times, persons living under dictatorial rule have experienced great suffering and even death for failing to exercise such extreme care in speaking. To their sorrow, many have found that the “walls have ears.” (10:20)

Ecclesiastes 11:1-10

Koheleth introduced a number of proverbial sayings, all of which encourage activity. The first one is, “Send forth your bread on the face of the waters, for in many days you will find it.” (11:1)

A number of translations render this as admonition to engage in trade. “Invest what you have, because after a while you will get a return.” (NCV) “Put your money into trade across the ocean. After a while you will earn something from it.” (NIRV) “Ship your grain across the sea; after many days you may receive a return.” (TNIV) “Send your grain across the seas, and in time you will get a return.” (REB) While the Hebrew term for “bread” (*léchem*) also designates the grain from which bread is made or denotes food generally, this word is not used as a synonym for “goods” or “merchandise.” If, therefore, the saying is to be understood as encouraging participation in trade, it could (as some translations do) limit the reference to exporting grain. Considerable trade by sea was conducted during Solomon’s reign. (1 Kings 10:22, 2 Chronicles 9:21) There is no indication, however, that the Israelites generally would have engaged in exporting grain and then receiving payment upon the successful return of the merchant ships. (11:1)

It appears preferable to regard Koheleth's words as encouraging generosity. "Be generous, and someday you will be rewarded." (CEV) Generous giving may seem comparable to sending out bread on the surface of the water, with no return in view. Nevertheless, expressions of true generosity may lead to a person's endearing himself to others. This may prompt appreciative response from recipients and their coming to his aid whenever he may find himself in need. The one sending out the "bread" would thus find it after the passage of "many days" or some time. (11:1)

Koheleth continued, "Give a portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what evil may occur on the earth." Like the previous proverbial saying, these words have been understood as applying either to business ventures or acts of generosity. Translators who take verse 1 to refer to business ventures, commonly represent the admonition of verse 2 as applying to the same. "Invest what you have in several different businesses, because you don't know what disasters might happen." (NCV) "Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight; you do not know what disaster may come upon the land." (TNIV) "Divide your merchandise among seven or perhaps eight ventures, since you do not know what disasters are in store for the world." (REB) According to such renderings, diversification provides a measure of assurance that, if not all, at least some of the undertakings will succeed. Because of life's uncertainties, there is greater risk of failure and accompanying loss whenever all efforts are concentrated on only one pursuit. (11:2)

Since, however, generosity probably is being encouraged in the opening verse of the chapter, it seems that verse 2 is continuing this admonition. The number "seven" is indicative of fullness or completeness, just as seven days constitute an entire week. As an intensification of "seven," "eight" serves to emphasize the unstinting nature of the giving. An overly cautious person may be inclined unduly to restrict the amount given and limit the giving to just a few, fearing that he might not have enough to weather reverses. Koheleth counseled that generosity not be restrained by such apprehension. (11:2)

The giver simply does not know just what "evil," "calamity," "distress," or "misfortune" may yet have to be faced. On earth, there are many uncertainties. The implication is that generous giving leads to one's later being more likely to become the recipient of assistance in a time of hardship. The sense of Koheleth's words may be similar to those of Jesus Christ, "Give, and it will be given to you." (11:2; Luke 6:38)

Providing admonition to avoid indecisiveness in one's actions, Koheleth said, "If the clouds are full, they pour out rain upon the earth; and if a tree falls to the south or to the north, [in the] place where the tree falls, there it will be." Once the clouds are at a point where it is going to rain, it will rain. No human can

prevent it. In the event a tree is uprooted during a storm, it will lie in the direction and in the place where it fell. A person's refraining from or engaging in some pursuit has no bearing on such things. Whatever may or may not happen should not be a basis for desisting from the usual routine of work. (11:3)

Pointing to the problem of letting uncertainty paralyze one's activity, Koheleth observed, "One who watches the wind will not sow; and one who looks at the clouds will not reap." The man who watched the wind, waiting for the ideal time to begin sowing, simply would not start. Reasoning that the wind could intensify, he would fear that the seed would be blown away as it was broadcast. Thinking that he might labor in vain, he would do nothing. Similarly, the person who watched the clouds would not begin the important harvest work. He would be afraid that it would rain and that the cut grain would be ruined by getting wet. (11:4)

Humans cannot determine the ideal time for every undertaking. Uncertainties are an integral part of life. Whatever may take place by reason of God's purpose or his toleration cannot be determined beforehand by some humanly devised rule or system. Illustrating this aspect of God's "work," Koheleth noted, "As you do not know what [is] the way of the spirit, [as also] the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes all." (11:5)

Man does not "know" or understand the "way" or manner in which the "spirit" or life principle operates in the formation of a baby. A pregnant woman would have become aware of the living being that was developing within her. Yet to all who knew about her pregnancy it would remain a mystery as to how the "bones" or the entire frame developed in the womb, forming a completely new little person. The renderings of a number of translations are more explicit than the Hebrew text in representing what is not known. "Just as you know not how the breath of life fashions the human frame in the mother's womb, so you know not the work of God which he is accomplishing in the universe." (NAB) "As you do not know how a pregnant woman comes to have a body and a living spirit in her womb, so you do not know the work of God, the maker of all things." (REV) "No one can explain how a baby breathes before it is born." (CEV) "Just as you do not know how the lifebreath passes into the limbs within the womb of the pregnant woman, so you cannot foresee the actions of God, who causes all things to happen." (11:5, Tanakh)

Because the Hebrew word for "spirit" (*rúach*) also means "wind," a number of translators render the term accordingly and so present two very different things that humans do not understand. "You do not understand how the wind blows, or how the embryo grows in a woman's womb." (NJB) "As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot

understand the work of God, the Maker of all things.” (NIV) “You don’t know where the wind will blow, and you don’t know how a baby grows inside the mother. In the same way, you don’t know what God is doing, or how he created everything.” (NCV) Since the wind and the development of the baby in the womb are unrelated, it appears preferable to understand *rúach* as meaning “spirit” or life principle. This is also supported by the reading, “spirit in bones,” which is found in numerous Hebrew manuscripts. (11:5)

God’s “work” includes everything that takes place according to his purpose, will, or permission. This “work” is humanly unfathomable. Because everything takes place by reason of divine action or allowance, Koheleth rightly said, “God who makes all” or everything. Whatever the Most High may do or permit in the outworking of his purpose cannot be determined beforehand without a revelation from him. Therefore, no one can, in each case, predict accurately which pursuits will succeed or which ones will fail. (11:5)

In view of the fact that life is filled with uncertainties and much is beyond human control, Koheleth advised, “In the morning sow your seed, and do not let your hand rest in the evening; for you do not know which will succeed, this or that, or whether both alike will be good.” Koheleth’s admonition is to be diligent in laboring from morning until the evening, not becoming indecisive because of life’s uncertainties or letting fear of failure stifle activity. Whereas the sowing of seed does not guarantee a good crop, failure to sow seed definitely means that there will be no harvest. Because a person does not know which of his endeavors will succeed or whether all of them will turn out well, he should simply go ahead with his pursuits, not worrying about possible failures. (11:6)

For a person to be unduly anxious about uncertainties would result in his having a gloomy outlook and a negative view of life. Diligence in working despite uncertainties, on the other hand, contributes to the enjoyment of life. Koheleth observed, “And the light [is] sweet, and [it is] good for the eyes to see the sun.” Humans are creatures of the day, and so the light is “sweet,” delightful, or pleasant. Only the living can enjoy the light and behold the pleasurable effects of the sun as it dispels the gloom of the night. To see the sun with one’s eyes means to be alive. Koheleth referred to this as “good,” pleasant, or delightful. (11:7)

Continuing with his encouragement to enjoy life, Koheleth said, “For if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in all [of them]. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. All that comes [is] vanity.” The years of life should not be dominated by one’s being in a sullen and gloomy state. Instead, each day should be appreciated and enjoyed to the full in a wholesome way. Days that could be delightful should not be ruined by useless worrying and fretting about what may or may not happen. (11:8)

A person should remember that the “days of darkness” are coming. It will then be impossible to find delight in what life has to offer. These “days” may refer to the years of old age, when strength diminishes, health deteriorates, and the capacity for enjoying life is greatly reduced. (Compare 2 Samuel 19:35.) As the days of affliction drag on, they appear to be many. The “days of darkness” could also designate the time when, in Sheol or in the realm of the dead, the eyes no longer see the sun and all activity ceases. (9:10) This would fit the fact that darkness is associated with Sheol, it being described as a “land of gloom” and “deep shadow.” (Job 10:21, 22) When compared with the brevity of life, the days in Sheol are many. (11:8)

If the many “days of darkness” relate to the period of lifelessness in Sheol, they are truly days of vanity, meaninglessness, or purposelessness, for all activity, accomplishments, and rejoicing have come to their end. The days of debilitating old age can also be described as vain. Progressive impairment of physical and mental faculties leads to one’s having but a painful existence. Life loses direction and purpose. Every day that passes seems vain, empty, meaningless, or futile. (11:8)

In view of the coming “days of darkness,” Koheleth admonished youths individually, “Rejoice, young man, in your youth, and let your heart do you good in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these [things] God will bring you into judgment.” (11:9)

The Hebrew term for “young man (*bachúr*)” designates a full-grown, vigorous, unmarried young man. Such a one is to find pleasure in his “youth” (*yaldhúth*, “childhood,” “young adulthood”). (11:9)

“Heart” here can designate the inner self. For the “heart” to do one good would indicate its being in a state of inner cheerfulness, manifest in a real zest for life and a countenance that radiates joy. The “days of youth” designate the time in which one is in the state of “young manhood” (*bechuróth*) or in the prime of life. (11:9)

“Walking” in the “ways of the heart” would denote pursuing the impelling desires that originate in the heart or the deep inner self. Since the eyes play a vital role in revealing all kinds of delightful things, Koheleth also encouraged “walking” in the “sight of the eyes,” or doing what the eyes have seen to be pleasurable. (11:9)

Koheleth did not advise following a course of unrestraint. He added a caution designed to help youths make wise choices. A young man is accountable to God for what he does. Not everything that may appeal to the desires is divinely

approved. Some things may momentarily satisfy cravings for pleasure but afterward result in serious harm. For a young man to follow a course contrary to the divine standard of what is right would lead to God's adverse judgment. That judgment would be evident in the young man's experiencing the bitter consequences of his wrong choice. "Knowing" or recognizing the certainty of divine judgment should govern which desires can properly be pursued. (11:9)

Continuing his cautionary advice, Koheleth concluded, "And remove vexation from your heart and let evil pass your flesh by, for youth and the prime of life [are] vanity." (11:10)

In this case, "heart" may denote the inner self. The Hebrew term for "vexation" (*ká'as*) signifies "irritation," "disturbance," "anger," "distress," or "grief." Vexation of the heart could denote an intense inner upheaval. Koheleth's advice is that a youth should avoid behavior that would cause him to have a troubled conscience and great mental anxiety or anguish. Thus he would "remove" or banish such disturbance from his "heart" or inner self. (11:10)

Indulging wrong desires can also harm the flesh or the physical organism. So, the encouragement is to prevent "evil" or something injurious from affecting the flesh. The painful thing should be made to pass by, leaving the flesh or physical organism unharmed. Overindulging in drink, taking foolhardy risks, or engaging in sexual promiscuity can greatly dissipate the strength and vigor of youth. Through risky behavior, a strong young man may find himself reduced to the state of a feeble cripple or may become progressively weaker from a debilitating disease. (11:10)

"Youth" (*yaldhúth*) and the "prime of life" are called "vanity," "emptiness," or "meaninglessness." This is probably because of the fleeting nature of youth. During the life of seventy or eighty years, young manhood or young womanhood occupies only a short period of time. Moreover, the enjoyment of youthful strength and vigor is of uncertain duration. Even youths contract serious illnesses and die. (11:10)

The Hebrew expression, rendered "prime of life" in a number of translations (HCSB, NASB, REB), is *shacharúth*. This term has been linked with *shachár*, which designates either "to be [or become] black" or "to break" or "to break forth" (as the light of the dawn does). Translators who associate the term with "black" have rendered the expression "age of black hair" (NJB) or "black hair" (Tanakh). The reference evidently would then be to the time of youth, before the hair turns gray and white. On the other hand, those who link the Hebrew word *shacharúth* to the breaking forth of the dawn use such expressions as "dawn of life" (ESV, NRSV), "dawn of youth" (NAB), or "prime of life" (REB). In either case, *shacharúth* relates to the time of youth. (11:10)

The Septuagint says *ánoia*, meaning “lack of understanding,” “ignorance,” or “folly.” George Lamsa’s translation, based on the Syriac, reads similarly, “Youth and ignorance are vanity.” This rendering suggests that youth and the lack of sound judgment characteristic of inexperienced youths are “vanity,” “emptiness,” “futility,” or part of the fleeting and transitory nature of human life. (11:10)

The Latin word *voluptas* appears in the concluding words of the Vulgate, and this term means “pleasure,” “delight,” or “enjoyment.” In harmony with the Vulgate, the translation by Ronald Knox says, “Youth and pleasures, they are so quickly gone.” (11:10)

Ecclesiastes 12:1-14

Kohleth continued the admonition that can apply to any young person, saying, “And remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near about which you will say, I have no delight in them.” The conjunction “and” indicates that this is a continuation of the words directed to youths (in the previous chapter). (12:1)

To remember the Creator would signify appreciatively to recognize him as the giver of life and the source of all blessings. Such remembering involves a reverential regard for him as the Maker of everything, and this is manifested by conduct harmonizing with his commands. (12:1; compare Deuteronomy 8:10-19.)

Being in the plural, the Hebrew expression for “your Creator” (*bohre’eyka*) signifies excellence, magnificence, or grandeur. He is the magnificent Creator. (12:1)

While in the prime of life, one should let the highest regard for the Creator and his will guide one’s decisions and conduct. The Hebrew word, rendered “youth” (*bechuróhth*), means “young manhood.” It refers to the time when one is enjoying the freshness of youth, for the term *bachúr* can apply to an adult unmarried male having youthful strength and vigor. (12:1)

The “evil days” are the days of old age, with their attendant ailments, loss of strength, and general deterioration of physical and, often, mental faculties. Accompanied by continued decline and no hope of any improvement, the days are indeed “evil” or “bad.” The capacity for enjoying food, drink, and other wholesome pleasures is greatly reduced and replaced by aches and pains. Hence, persons of advanced age come to the point where they may say that they have no delight or pleasure in the declining years of their life. (12:1) Their sentiments are like those expressed by Barzillai when invited by King David to join him in

Jerusalem. “I am now eighty years old. I cannot tell what is pleasant and what is not; I cannot taste what I eat or drink; I can no longer listen to the voice of men and women singing. Why should I be a further burden on your majesty?” (2 Samuel 19:35, REB)

The person who has remembered his Creator when young, however, can look back with satisfaction on his former years. By having avoided the injurious effects of a reckless way of life in youth, he has also benefited by not contributing to the problems of old age.

Seemingly contrasting the time of youth with that of old age, Koheleth said, “before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened, and the clouds return after the rain.” Youth is the summertime of life. The sun shines from a cloudless sky, and the days are “light” or bright. Nights are also delightful, as the moon and the stars adorn the black sky. Old age, on the other hand, is the wintertime of life. In winter, the days are dark and gloomy in the land where Koheleth resided. On account of overcast skies, the sun, moon, and stars are concealed from sight, thus darkened. The light or brightness of summer yields to the dark gray of winter. After downpours of cold rain, perhaps followed by some clearing of the sky, the clouds quickly return. In old age, the days lose their brightness, and no light dispels the darkness of the nights. The declining years of life are like the damp, cold and gloomy days and nights of winter, with rains in the form of difficulties, pains and distresses that follow one another in rapid succession. (12:2)

It appears that Koheleth provided a poetic portrayal of the debilitating effects on the physical organism, saying, “in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the grinders cease [functioning] because they are few, and those that look through the windows [find it] darkened.” (12:3; see the Notes section.)

Elsewhere in the scriptures, the human body is referred to as a “tent” or “house.” (2 Corinthians 5:1, 2, 4; 2 Peter 1:13, 14) So there is a basis for considering the “house” to be the body and Koheleth’s description to relate to various parts thereof. “Your body will grow feeble.” (12:3, CEV)

The “guards,” “keepers,” or “guardians” of the house could be the arms and hands. They serve as the protectors of the house or the body, shielding it from injury, keeping it clean, and supplying what it needs to function properly. In old age, the arms weaken and the hands tremble. (12:3)

As the supporters and transporters of the rest of the body, the legs could be designated as “strong men.” The Shulammitte described the legs of her lover as “pillars.” (Song of Solomon 5:15) With advancing years, the legs cease to be

straight, sturdy pillars. Muscle tone and mass decrease, and the legs bend at the knees. The gait becomes slow, awkward, and unstable. (12:3)

Few are the “grinders” or “grinding women,” possibly meaning the teeth. When most or all of the teeth are missing, the process of grinding food basically ceases. Toothless gums are only capable of handling soft, mushy foods. (12:3)

“Those that look through the windows,” or “the ladies that peer through the windows” (Tanakh), may refer to the eyes. As they look between the opened eyelids from their window-like orbits, the eyes see as if in a haze or in a “darkened” condition. Vision is poor and, at times, blindness sets in. (12:3)

Koheleth continued the description, “and the doors on the street are shut, when the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are weakened.” (12:4)

Psalm 141:3 refers to the “door of my lips,” and so the “doors” could designate the lips that close the mouth. When visible to all, the lips are like the double doors of a house facing the street. In old age, on account of toothless gums, the lips fold inward and, therefore, might be spoken of as being shut “on the street.” Since the lips are involved in speaking, the reference could also be to the fact that the making of public expression comes to an end. Infirmary prevents a person of advanced age from being an active participant in the affairs of life conducted in public places. The Septuagint reads *agorá* (“marketplace”), not street. Accordingly, the doors of the mouth would be closed with reference to the busy thoroughfare. (12:4)

Since the “grinders” may be the “teeth,” the “sound of the grinding” (or the “sound of the mill” [REB]) could refer to the dull, muffled sound of chewing food with toothless gums. In a number of translations, the closed doors are represented as the ears and the low “sound of the grinding” as poor hearing. “The noisy grinding of grain will be shut out by your deaf ears.” (CEV) “Your ears will be deaf to the noise in the streets, and you will barely hear the millstone grinding grain.” (NCV) Loss of hearing, however, may be indicated by the expression “all the daughters of song are weakened.” (12:4; see the Notes section.)

The elderly no longer sleep soundly. They tend to wake up frequently, and the periods of wakefulness last longer than in the case of younger people. Because much of the sleep is light, the aged may be roused at the “sound of a bird” even if their hearing is limited. Unable to go back to sleep after being awakened by the sound of a bird early in the morning, they may rise. Because deafness is a common affliction of the elderly, they may not be able to hear bird calls. On

account of sleeplessness, though, they may get up at the time the first chirping starts. (12:4)

“Daughters of song” could denote the musical notes, all of which sound low or faint. This is the sense a number of translations convey (“all the strains of music dying down” [Tanakh]; “you will barely hear singing” [NCV]). Translations vary, however, as to the interpretation placed on the words “daughters of song.” Koheleth’s words have been understood as indicating that the elderly cease to sing or that their rendition of songs is feeble. “Your voice will become thin and trembling.” (*Deine Stimme wird dünn und zittrig*. [German, *Gute Nachricht Bibel*]) Others have limited the expression “daughters of song” to the song of birds (“songbirds fall silent” [REB]). “Already early in the morning you wake up with the chirping of birds, although you can barely even hear their singing.” (*Schon frühmorgens beim Zwitschern der Vögel wachst du auf, obwohl du ihren Gesang kaum noch hören kannst*. [German, *Hoffnung für alle*]) (12:4)

With apparent reference to the aged, Koheleth observed, “They are afraid also of a height, and terrors [are] in the way; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself, and the caper berry bursts, because man is going to his eternal home, and mourners are going about on the streets.” (12:5)

Being unsteady on his feet and, perhaps, subject to dizzy spells, an old man is more likely to fall when climbing. Ascending elevations also poses problems because of shortness of breath and the great effort required on account of enfeeblement. Such factors cause the elderly to be afraid of heights. The Septuagint reads, “Indeed from a height, they will see, and terrors [are] in the way.” This could mean that the elderly, from an elevated spot, could see things that would make them fearful. (12:5)

The roads or busy thoroughfares can prove to be terrifying. Impaired hearing, poor eyesight, and lack of agility make it difficult to avoid hazards. Unscrupulous persons may also prey on defenseless elderly ones, making them targets for robbery. (Compare Proverbs 1:11-13.) Due to deterioration of physical and mental faculties, the aged face real perils and may also imagine terrors. (12:5)

Before its leaves appear, the almond tree starts to bloom at the end of January or the beginning of February. The blossoms usually are pink and, at times, white. At the tips, the petals turn white, making the tree appear white when in full bloom. If the reference to the blooming of the almond tree relates to an old man, it could refer to the fact that the hair turns white. (12:5)

The words “the grasshopper drags itself” could be descriptive of an old man. Being stiff, and having crooked elbows sticking out beyond the sides of the

stooped body, he might be said to resemble a grasshopper, but he “drags himself,” shuffling slowly as he moves awkwardly and unsteadily. The Hebrew expression may also be rendered, “the grasshopper is a burden.” This suggests that, when alighting on an aged, infirm person, something as little as a grasshopper is burdensome. In the Septuagint, Vulgate, and Syriac, the basic meaning is “the grasshopper becomes fat.” The renderings of the ancient versions could be understood to denote that an old man may be considerably overweight, as was 98-year-old Eli. (1 Samuel 4:15, 18) Perhaps the translators regarded the Hebrew as meaning that the grasshopper became “burdened [with fat].” (12:5)

Modern translators have interpretively rendered the Hebrew text in various ways. “You will limp along like a grasshopper when you walk.” (NCV) “You will feel lifeless and drag along like an old grasshopper.” (CEV) “Arduously you drag yourself through the day.” (*mühsam schleppst du dich durch den Tag* [German, *Hoffnung für alle*]) (12:5)

When pickled, the caper berry (Hebrew, *'aviyyohnáh*; Greek, *kápparis* [LXX]; Latin, *capparis* [Vulgate]) serves as a condiment to stimulate desire for food. In describing what happens to the fruit of the caper plant, a form of the word *parár* appears in the Hebrew text. This term may mean “to burst,” or “to be void,” and so could signify “to become ineffectual,” possibly with reference to stimulating an old person’s appetite. “Your appetite will be gone.” (NCV) The reference to the caper berry has also been related to sexual desire (“without any sexual desire” [NLT]). (12:5)

Instead of relating to an old man, the descriptions from the almond tree onward have been presented as having an application to the plants themselves. “For the almond tree may blossom, the grasshopper be burdened, and the caper bush may bud again.” (Tanakh) Since the reference to the grasshopper does not fit in logically, a footnote in the Tanakh gives an alternate reading, *Emendation yields ‘the squill (postbiblical Heb. hasab) resume its burden,’ i.e., its blossom-stalk and its leaves*. The thought conveyed is that the almond tree, the squill, and the caper plant seem to be dead but then, at the end of the dormant period, come alive with new growth. No similar revival takes place for man when he dies. (12:5)

Man, in his state of decline, is “going,” walking, or heading to his “house” or “home” — the realm of the dead. This “house” is described as “eternal” or “lasting,” the Hebrew word *ohlám* denoting time that has no set limit. Because death is approaching, the mourners “are going about in the street,” readily available when the individual dies. Besides relatives, friends, and close acquaintances, professional mourners would wail in a loud and bitter manner. (12:5)

Koheleth's next words could relate to the dissolution of the body at death. The opening expression *'adh'asher* ("as yet even"), commonly rendered "before," is to be linked with the encouragement to "remember your Creator" (verse 1). For clarity, a number of translations have added the words ("remember your Creator"; or "remember him") at the beginning of verse 6. The Hebrew text reads, "before the silver cord is removed and the golden bowl is broken, and the jar at the spring is shattered, and the wheel at the cistern is crushed." (12:6)

The Hebrew term (*racháq*) that describes what happens to the "silver cord" may be translated "is removed." Numerous modern translations render *racháq* as "severed," which rendering has the support of the Vulgate and the Syriac. In the Septuagint, the word used is *anatrépo*, meaning "to overthrow" or "to ruin." When broken, the "golden bowl" could no longer function as a useful container. A jar or vessel at a spring or cistern is repeatedly filled and emptied. When shattered, the earthenware jar can no longer serve this purpose. (12:6)

Neither the context nor other scriptures make it possible to establish whether the "silver cord," the "golden bowl," the "jar," or the "wheel" at the cistern designate specific body parts. Possibly Koheleth simply intended to portray the sudden end of life in three different ways. (1) The silver cord snaps, the bowl (filled with oil and containing a lighted wick) falls to the ground and is damaged, the oil is spilled, and the flame goes out. (2) A jar filled with water hits the sides of the well too hard, and the precious liquid flows out of the broken jar. (3) The wheel at the cistern is shattered, and the drawing of water stops immediately. (12:6; see the Notes section.)

Once the person is dead, "the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it." The first man was formed from the "dust" or the elements of the ground. As descendants of the first man, all humans or earthlings are made of "dust." At death, the physical organism decomposes, returning to the elements of which it consisted originally. Psalm 146:4 expresses a similar thought: "When his spirit goes forth he returns to the earth, on that very day all his plans come to nothing." (NJB) The "spirit" or principle of life, however, did not originate spontaneously from the lifeless dust. In the case of the first man, his lifeless body was animated by the "spirit" or life principle that God imparted. Never having been a part of the earth, the spirit could not return to it. Instead, as Koheleth said, it "returns to God, the source and the giver thereof. (12:7)

The "return of the spirit to God" may also include the thought that all future life prospects rest with him, the One into whose hands the spirit is committed. (12:7; Psalm 31:5) This harmonizes with the scriptural reference to the revivifying power of God's spirit. "When you take away their spirit, they die and return to

the dust from which they came. When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you give new life to the earth.” (Psalm 104:29, 30, REB)

Man’s life is comparatively brief, and death ends all his plans and activities. Nothing enduring is left behind. In most cases, even the name will cease to be remembered by future generations. Therefore, the words found at the beginning of the book are repeated at this point. “‘Vanity of vanities,’ says Koheleth, ‘the whole — vanity.’” It is a vanity, a futility, an emptiness above all others — a vanity of the superlative degree. “All,” “the whole,” or everything in human affairs, that came under Koheleth’s careful study and observation proved to be meaningless, purposeless, futile, or vain. Nothing had any permanence or lasting value. (12:8)

12:9-14. Conclusion reached-practical piety in view of judgment

“And besides having become wise, Koheleth also taught the people knowledge.” By using his God-given reasoning faculties in carefully observing human affairs and evaluating his findings, Koheleth became wise or acquired real insight respecting practical matters of life and in solving perplexing problems. He did not selfishly keep others in ignorance, jealously maintaining his superiority over them so as to be able to exercise greater control. Instead, he instructed them, generously sharing his extensive knowledge. (12:9)

Seemingly, regarding his efforts to be a good teacher, Koheleth spoke of “weighing,” “searching out,” and “arranging many proverbs.” The rendering “weighing” is based on considering the Hebrew word consisting of three consonants (aleph, zayin, and nun) to be *’azán*, meaning “to weigh,” “to ponder,” or “to consider carefully.” These three consonants may also be understood to mean “ear” and “to listen.” The Septuagint reads, “An ear will search out well-arranged parables,” indicating that Koheleth’s ear was always open to hear “well-arranged parables,” which he then added to his fund of knowledge and used in teaching the people. A number of translations express a similar thought. “[He] gave ear.” (Young) “He listened to and tested the soundness of many maxims.” (12:9, Tanakh)

The Hebrew word *chaqár* basically means to “search out,” “to explore,” and has also been rendered “scrutinized” (NAB), “explored” (HCSB), “looked for” (NLB), and “studied” (NJB). As to what Koheleth did with the proverbs, wise sayings, or maxims, the Hebrew word describing this action is *taqán*, which means “to make straight.” This may signify that he arranged proverbs in a particular order. “To make straight” could also mean to correct, and this is expressed by the rendering “emended many proverbs.” (12:9, NJB)

Koheleth sought to find “delightful words and [to write] correct words of truth.” The finding of “delightful words” could refer to the effort required in the selection of subjects that would give pleasure or delight to the readers and to those hearing the reading of what was recorded. This could suggest that the words were useful, meaningful, and of genuine interest. On the other hand, the focus could be on the choice and arrangement of the words — “attractive style” (NJB). Truth, however, was not sacrificed for the sake of giving pleasure to the reader or preserving a delightful style. The Hebrew term describing the “words of truth” as “genuine” or “upright” is *yósher*, basically conveying the sense of “straightness.” The words were “genuinely truthful sayings” (Tanakh); “what he wrote was upright and true” (NIV). (12:10)

“The words of the wise [are] like goads.” A goad or prod consisted of a long wooden pole to which a sharp metal point was attached. It was used to prick a draft animal so that it would move forward in the right direction. Like goads, the words or sayings of persons possessing sound judgment or insight can motivate others to take the proper course. The words of the wise can prick the conscience and prompt appropriate or corrective action. Even the expressions and attitudes of persons rightly affected by the words can change for the better. (12:11)

“And like nails driven in [are] owners of collections.” “Owners” or “masters” of “collections” may designate sages who are depositories of many wise sayings which they understand and apply correctly. Such persons continue to grow in their fund of knowledge, resulting in expanding their “collections” of meaningful maxims. (12:11)

Nails that are driven in provide support and stability for an object. With reference to those whom they teach and admonish, wise persons are like nails, serving as a stabilizing influence and giving support and encouragement as they draw on their “collections.” Once driven in, nails have a permanent place. So, the allusion could also be to the temporary goadlike or pricking effect of the spoken word and the abiding nature of the written word with its potential for continuing to influence others. (12:11)

Numerous translators understand the Hebrew expression “owners of collections” to apply to the collected sayings rather than the persons who are the depositories of such collections (“their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails” [NIV], “like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings” [NRSV], “like nails driven home” [REB], “like nails that fasten things together” [CEV]). The Tanakh links “nails” with “goads.” “The sayings of the wise are like goads, like nails fixed in prodding sticks.” It seems preferable, though, to regard the term *bá‘al* in its usual sense as meaning “master” or “owner.” (12:11)

Wise sayings “were given by one Shepherd.” The words of the wise and the “collections” of profitable sayings in their possession are from the one who is the source of their wisdom — God. YHWH gives wisdom; from his mouth [come] knowledge and understanding.” (Proverbs 2:6); “YHWH [is] my shepherd.” (12:11; Psalm 23:1)

Regarding anything written that does not reflect God-given wisdom, Koheleth continued, “And anything beyond these, my son, beware. There is no end to the making of many books, and much study wearies the flesh.” The expression “son” could refer to a youth or a pupil, one not yet in possession of the wisdom and experience associated with age. Such a one could easily be swayed by what he read. Hence, there was good reason for him to be given the caution to beware of writings that did not reflect God-given wisdom. Much of what was available had no value and could prove to be injurious. There simply was no end to all the books that had been and continued to be written. For example, in the third century BCE, Demetrius, librarian in Alexandria, Egypt, told King Ptolemy II Philadelphus that there were over 200,000 volumes in the library and that it was his hope to increase the number to 500,000. (12:12; see the Notes section.)

The Hebrew word for “study” (*lahág*) is thought to be drawn from an unused root conveying the idea of being greatly addicted to something. An all-consuming interest in the vast, growing field of writings can wear a person down physically. A slavish, indiscriminate devotion to books is wearisome or exhausting to the “flesh,” the physical organism. (12:12)

After his careful investigation and evaluation of human affairs, Koheleth concluded, “Final word, all having been heard: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is man’s all.” In Hebrew, the term “word” (*davár*) can also mean “thing,” “affair” or “matter,” and this (in connection with the Hebrew term *sohph* (“end”)) has been rendered as “the conclusion of the matter” (NIV), “the sum of the matter” (Tanakh), and “the end of the matter” (NRSV). The basic thought is the same — after all has been heard or examined, one conclusion is reached. Humans or earthlings should fear God, be in awe of him, or have a wholesome dread of displeasing him. They should also keep his commandments, letting his word and will guide what they do and say. Divine commandments or guidelines should influence their attitude and their thoughts. (12:13)

The “all of man” or “man’s all” may denote (1) man’s complete obligation or (2) man’s whole purpose for being. Both meanings are to be found in the renderings of translators. (12:13) “This is the whole duty of man.” (NIV) “This applies to all mankind.” (Tanakh) “There is no more to man than this.” (NEB) “This is the whole man.” (Margolis) “This is what life is all about.” (CEV)

Pointing out that humans are accountable for their actions and should, therefore, fear God and keep his commandments, Koheleth added, “For God will bring every work into judgment, [even] every hidden thing, whether good or evil.” Nothing escapes the attention of the Most High. People will be called to account for their actions, even those concealed from human view. A court higher than that of any man will determine what was “good” or “evil.” (12:14)

Jesus Christ similarly referred to this accountability. “On the day of judgment people will render an account for every careless word they speak. By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matthew 12:36, 37, NAB) Recognizing the certainty of a coming judgment should serve to restrain one from making derogatory, deceptive or slanderous expressions and engaging in corrupt conduct. The apostle Peter reminded fellow Christians: “If you say ‘Father’ to him who judges everyone impartially on the basis of what they have done, you must live in awe of him during your time on earth.” (1 Peter 1:17, REB)

Notes:

Many have understood the poetic language of verses 3 and 4 as describing what happens to the humans body as it ages, and this significance has been made explicit in the renderings of a number of modern translations. Others, however, have regarded the words to relate to what happens to an estate as it falls into a condition of neglect and deterioration; or they have taken the imagery to refer to the fearful response of individuals in a large household when about to face a severe storm (which is regarded as representative of death). One of the descriptions in particular does not seem to fit either of these explanations. The “grinders” (which word is feminine gender in Hebrew and, therefore, can be rendered “grinding women”) are said to have “ceased,” or stopped working, because of being few. The decline of an estate would not end the need to grind grain because fewer women would be available for this essential labor, nor would an approaching storm reduce the number of women doing the grinding and so could not be the reason for stopping the activity.

Although interpretively representing the “doors” of verse 4 as the “lips, the *New Living Translation* gives a meaning to the verse that is not apparent from the Hebrew text nor from the Septuagint. “And when your teeth are gone, keep your lips tightly closed when you eat!”

The reference to the blossoming of the almond tree, to the grasshopper, and to the caper berry (in verse 5) has also been considered as serving to contrast with developments regarding the deceased. “Outside the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper eats itself full, and the caper fruit bursts open, but you they carry to your last dwelling place. On the street, they start mourning for you.” (*Draußen*

blüht der Mandelbaum, die Heuschrecke frisst sich voll und die Kaperfrucht bricht auf; aber dich trägt man zu deiner letzten Wohnung. Auf der Straße stimmen sie die Totenklage für dich an. [German, *Gute Nachricht Bibel*]).

A number of views about verse 6 that were expressed in past centuries have gained a measure of acceptance. The “silver cord” has been understood to designate the “spinal cord; the “golden bowl,” the brain, or the bowl-like cranium that contains the brain; and the “jar,” the heart. The “wheel at the cistern” has been linked to the circulation of blood.

When understood to be the “silver cord,” the spinal cord could be spoken as being removed from its previous position in the living body, for it ceases to function at death. If designating the “golden bowl,” the brain (in its broken state at death) can no longer fill its vital role in the body. As a container for liquid, the “pitcher,” “jar,” or “vessel” could refer to the heart through which the blood courses. Because the blood continues to flow in and out of it, the heart is comparable to a vessel at a spring. As the flow of water into a vessel stops when the wheel at the cistern is crushed or broken, so death ends the circulation of blood from the heart to other parts of the body.

The example cited in connection with verse 12 is taken from what is known as the “Letter of Aristeas,” which contains a traditional account about the origin of the Torah portion of the Septuagint.





First picture, summit of the Mount of Hermon (Son of Solomon 4:8). Second picture, climbing of Mount Hermon

Song of Solomon (Song of Songs)

Introduction

The Song of Solomon, called in the *Vulgate* and *Septuagint*, "The Song of Songs," from the opening words. This *title* denotes its *superior excellence*, according to the *Hebrew* idiom; so *holy of holies*, equivalent to "most holy" (Exodus 29:37 *the heaven of heavens*, equivalent to the highest heavens (Deuteronomy 10:14 immediately after the Pentateuch in manuscripts of the Jewish Scriptures. It is also fourth of the Hagiographa (*Cetubim*, *writings*) or the third division of the Old Testament, the other two being the Law and the Prophets. The Jewish enumeration of the *Cetubim* is Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Canticles, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra (including Nehemiah), and Chronicles. Its *canonicity* is certain; it is found in all *Hebrew* manuscripts of Scripture; also in the *Greek Septuagint*; in the catalogues of MELITO, bishop of Sardis, A.D. 170 (EUSEBIUS, *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.26), and of others of the ancient Church.

ORIGEN and JEROME tell us that the Jews forbade it to be read by any until he was thirty years old. It certainly needs a degree of spiritual maturity to enter aright into the holy mystery of love which it allegorically sets forth. To such as have attained this maturity, of whatever age they be, the Song of Songs is one of the most edifying of the sacred writings. ROSENMULLER justly says, The sudden transitions of the bride from the court to the grove are inexplicable, on the supposition that it describes merely human love. Had it been the latter, it would have been positively objectionable, and never would have been inserted in the holy canon. The allusion to "Pharaoh's chariots" (Solomon 1:9 the love of Solomon and Pharaoh's daughter is the subject of the Song. But this passage alludes to a remarkable event in the history of the Old Testament Church, the deliverance from the hosts and chariots of Pharaoh at the Red Sea. (However, allusions are quite opposed to the notion; the bride is represented at times as a shepherdess (Solomon 1:7 (Genesis 46:34 it. The Christian fathers, ORIGEN and THEODORET, compared the teachings of Solomon to a ladder with three steps; Ecclesiastes, natural (the nature of sensible things, vain); Proverbs, moral; Canticles, mystical (figuring the union of Christ and the Church). The Jews compared Proverbs to the outer court of Solomon's temple, Ecclesiastes to the holy place, and Canticles to the holy of holies. Understood allegorically, the Song is cleared of all difficulty. "Shulamith" (Solomon 6:13 *Daughter of Peace* being the feminine of Solomon, equivalent to the *Prince of Peace*. She by turns is a vinedresser, shepherdess, midnight inquirer, and prince's consort and daughter, and He a suppliant drenched with night dews, and a king in His palace, in harmony with the various relations of the Church and Christ. As Ecclesiastes sets forth the vanity of love of the creature, Canticles sets forth the fullness of the love which joins believers and the Saviour. The entire economy of salvation, says HARRIS, aims at restoring to the world the lost spirit of love. God is love, and Christ is the embodiment of the love of God. As the other books of Scripture present severally their own aspects of divine truth, so Canticles furnishes the believer with language of holy love, wherewith his heart can commune with his Lord; and it portrays the intensity of Christ's love to him; the affection of love was created in man to be a transcript of the divine love, and the Song clothes the latter in words; were it not for this, we should be at a loss for language, having the divine warrant, wherewith to express, without presumption, the fervor of the love between Christ and us. The image of a bride, a bridegroom, and a marriage, to represent this spiritual union, has the sanction of Scripture throughout; nay, the spiritual union was *the original fact in the mind of God*, of which marriage is the transcript (Isaiah 54:5 ; 62:5 ; Jeremiah 3:1 Ezekiel 16:1-63 ; 23:1-49 ; Matthew 9:15 ; 22:2 ; 25:1 Ephesians 5:23-32 the union of Christ and the Church as if the former were the first; but comes down from the latter as the first and best recognized fact on which the relation of marriage is based Revelation 19:7 ; 21:2 ; 22:17 all, the Song seems to correspond to, and form a trilogy with, Psalms 45 and 72, which contain the

same imagery; just as Psalm 37 answers to Proverbs, and the Psalms 39 and 73 to Job. Love to Christ is the strongest, as it is the purest, of human passions, and therefore needs the strongest language to express it: to the pure in heart the phraseology, drawn from the rich imagery of Oriental poetry, will not only appear not indelicate or exaggerated, but even below the reality. A single emblem is a *type*; the actual rites, incidents, and persons of the Old Testament were appointed types of truths afterwards to be revealed. But the *allegory* is a continued metaphor, in which the circumstances are palpably often purely imagery, while the thing signified is altogether real. The clue to the meaning of the Song is not to be looked for in the allegory itself, but in other parts of Scripture. "It lies in the casket of revelation an exquisite gem, engraved with emblematical characters, with nothing literal thereon to break the consistency of their beauty" [BURROWES]. This accounts for the name of God not occurring in it. Whereas in the *parable* the writer narrates, in the *allegory* he never does so. The Song throughout consists of immediate addresses either of Christ to the soul, or of the soul to Christ. "The experimental knowledge of Christ's loveliness and the believer's love is the best commentary on the whole of this allegorical Song" [LEIGHTON]. Like the curiously wrought Oriental lamps, which do not reveal the beauty of their transparent emblems until lighted up within, so the types and allegories of Scripture, "the lantern to our path" (Psalms 119:105 light of the Holy Spirit of Jesus to reveal their significance. The details of the allegory are not to be too minutely pressed. In the Song, with an Oriental profusion of imagery, numbers of lovely, sensible objects are aggregated not strictly congruous, but portraying jointly by their very diversity the thousand various and seemingly opposite beauties which meet together in Christ.

The unity of subject throughout, and the recurrence of the same expressions (Song of Solomon 2:6 Song of Solomon 2:7 ; 3:5 ; Song of Solomon 8:3 Song of Solomon 8:4 ; 2:16 ; 6:3 ; 7:10 ; 3:6 ; 6:10 ; 8:5 the unity of the poem, in opposition to those who make it consist of a number of separate erotic songs. The sudden transitions (for example, from the midnight knocking at a humble cottage to a glorious description of the King) accord with the alternations in the believer's experience. However various the divisions assigned be, most commentators have observed four breaks (whatever more they have imagined), followed by four abrupt beginnings (Solomon 2:7 ; 3:5 ; 5:1 ; 8:4 Thus there result five parts, all alike ending in full repose and refreshment. We read (1 Kings 4:32 thousand and *five*." The odd number *five* added over the complete *thousand* makes it not unlikely that the "five" refers to the Song of songs, consisting of five parts.

It answers to the idyllic poetry of other nations. The Jews explain it of the union of Jehovah and ancient Israel; the allusions to the *temple* and the *wilderness* accord with this; some Christians of Christ and the Church; others of Christ and

the individual believer. All these are true; for the Church is one in all ages, the ancient typifying the modern Church, and its history answering to that of each individual soul in it. Jesus "sees all, as if that all were one, loves one, as if that one were all." "The time suited the manner of this revelation; because types and allegories belonged to the old dispensation, which reached its ripeness under Solomon, when the temple was built". The daughter of Zion at that time was openly married to Jehovah"; for it is thenceforth that the prophets, in reproving Israel's subsequent sin, speak of it as a breach of her marriage covenant. The songs heretofore sung by her were the preparatory hymns of her childhood; "the last and crowning "Song of Songs" was prepared for the now mature maiden against the day of her marriage to the King of kings" [ORIGEN]. Solomon was peculiarly fitted to clothe this holy mystery with the lovely natural imagery with which the Song abounds; for "he spake of trees, from the cedar in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall" (1 Kings 4:33 higher qualification was his knowledge of the eternal Wisdom or Word of God (Proverbs 8:1-36 prepared the way, in Psalms 45 and 72; the son perfected the allegory. It seems to have been written in early life, long before his declension; for after it a song of holy gladness would hardly be appropriate. It was the song of his first love, in the kindness of his youthful espousals to Jehovah. Like other inspired books, its sense is not to be restricted to that local and temporary one in which the writer may have understood it; it extends to all ages, and shadows forth everlasting truth (1 Peter 1:11 1 Peter 1:12 ; 2 Peter 1:20 2 Peter 1:21

Three notes of time occur (1) The Jewish Church speaks of the Gentile Church (Solomon 8:8 speaks to the apostles (Solomon 5:1 speaks of the coming of Christ (Solomon 1:2 have, in direct order, Christ about to come, and the cry for the advent; Christ finishing His work on earth, and the last supper; Christ ascended, and the call of the Gentiles. In another aspect we have: (1) In the individual soul the longing for the manifestation of Christ to it, and the various alternations in its experience (Song of Solomon 1:2 Song of Solomon 1:4 ; 2:8 ; Song of Solomon 3:1 Song of Solomon 3:4 Song of Solomon 3:6 Song of Solomon 3:7 enjoyment of His sensible consolations, which is soon withdrawn through the bride's carelessness (Solomon 5:1-3 Him, and reconciliation (Solomon 5:8-16 ; 6:3 (3) Effects of Christ's manifestation on the believer; namely, assurance, labours of love, anxiety for the salvation of the impenitent, eagerness for the Lord's second coming (Song of Solomon 7:10 Song of Solomon 7:12 ; Song of Solomon 8:8-10 Song of Solomon 8:14

General Outline

Of all the books of the Old Testament I feel myself least competent to speak of the Canticles, or the Song of Solomon. I am not ignorant of what others have thought and written about the book, but personally I have not grasped its

contents as in the case of some of the other books. Under the circumstances, therefore, the best I can do just now is to give in substance what other teachers have said. I think Angus' *Bible Hand-Book* is a good guide, and I will draw chiefly from that source.

Internal evidence seems to confirm the voice of antiquity that Solomon wrote the book (1 Kings 4: 32). As it is called the Song of Songs, the title carries with it the idea that it is the best of all his songs. Moreover, although it is not quoted in the New Testament, yet it always formed part of the Old as far as we have record, and was in the canon of sacred Scripture which Jesus and His apostles recognized as such.

When it was written is not known, but its imagery seems to be drawn from the marriage of Solomon either with Pharaoh's daughter or some native of Palestine, espoused some years later, of noble birth, though inferior to her husband. For the first idea compare such places as 1 Kings 3 : 1; 7 : 8 ; 9: 24, with chapters 1: 9, and 6: 12 of the Song, and for the second, look at the language of the Song, 2 : 1, 7: 1 ; 1: 6.

There are two characters who speak and act throughout, Shelomoh, a masculine name, meaning "peaceful," and Shulamith, a feminine form of the same name, (1: 6; 3 : 11 ; 6: 13 ; 8 : 12). There is also a chorus of virgins, daughters of Jerusalem, (2: 7; 3: 5; 5: 8, 9). Towards the close two brothers of Shulamith appear, (8: 8, 9; 1 : 6). As in most of the Hebrew poetry, and indeed all ancient poems, there are no breaks to indicate change of scene or speakers, which is to be determined partly by the sense, but chiefly by the use of the original of the feminine and masculine pronouns.

The whole book, as our author and many others believe, is to be regarded as a description of wedded love; and yet, of course, it has a higher aim. It is noticeable that there is a sudden change from the singular to the plural pronoun in 1: 4, which seems to indicate that Shulamith must be taken collectively ; a fact which, put together with some other things gives credence to the idea

Outline of the Book

The following is Angus' outline of the Song of Songs :

1. **Shulamith speaks**, 1: 2-6; then in dialogue with Shelomoh ;
Shul., 1 : 7; Shel., 1 : 8-11 ; Shul., 1 : 12-14; Shel., 1:15 ; Shul., 1 : 16-2 : 1;
Shel., 2: 2; Shul., 2 : 3.
2. **Shulamith now rests**, sleeps and dreams (Shelomoh addressing the daughters of Jerusalem, and charging them not to wake her, 2 : 7 ; 3 : 5) ; 2 : 4-6, 8-3 : 4.

3. **The daughters of Jerusalem** see a nuptial procession approaching (3 : 6-11).

4. **Dialogue between Shelomoh and Shulamith.** Shelomoh speaks (4: 1-16) (as far as "flow out"), Shul., 4: 16; Shel., 5: 1.

5. **A night scene** : Shulamith seeking for Shelomoh ; meets and converses with the daughters of Jerusalem ; Shul., 5: 2-8; daughters of Jerusalem, 5 : 5-9 ; Shul., 5: 10-16; daughters of Jerusalem, 6 : 1; Shul., 6 : 2, 3.

6. **Morning scene** ; Shelomoh visits his garden early, and meets Shulamith ; Shel., 6:4-10; Shul., 6: 11, 12; the dialogue continuing to 8 : 8.

7. **The brothers of Shulamith** are introduced and speak : 8: 8, 9; Shulamith answers them, 8: 10-12; Shelomoh speaks, 8: 13; and Shulamith answers, closing the scene, (8: 14).

Prophecy in the Song of Solomon

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He [*Jesus Christ -Yeshua*] was in the beginning with God.

The Book of Songs of Solomon is a poetic love song written by King Solomon. It is the fifth of the five books of poetry and wisdom. It was written early in his reign over Israel that began in 971 BC at a time when his heart was right with God. This is evident by his devotion to a Shulamite woman, the exception to his later political marriages that eventually led him away from God and into idolatry.

Solomon's song tells a story of the joy of romantic love, one that is authentic. His song takes us on his journey from courtship to the wedding and to the growth of love during its struggles. The poetic Song of Solomon is easy to read because of its simple message of love between a man and a woman. When experienced in the confines of God's word, the emotional and sexual pleasures are a gift from God.

From the spiritual perspective, this message of love is demonstrated by *Christ* for His church. At the first resurrection, *Christ* will present his bride, the church, to His Father. When God creates a new earth and heaven after the great white throne judgment, He will present a New Jerusalem brought down from heaven prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Song of Solomon 1-3: The courtship of love

Song of Solomon 3-5: The wedding; the consummation of marriage

Song of Solomon 5-8: The struggles and growth of love

Searchlight on Prophecy in the Book of Songs

Judaism breaks the Old Testament down into three major sections: the Law, the Prophets and the Writings or Psalms (see Luke 24:44). As an organizational tool, this division of books works well, but it has also served to restrict Bible students to a narrow view of the material in these sections. For instance, some are slow to notice law in the Prophets, wisdom in the Law, prophecy in the Writings and so on.

On the other hand, commentators have always noted the prophetic character of many of the Psalms. Psalm 22 is obviously prophetic of Christ's suffering and death. Psalm 118 predicts Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem just before He was crucified (Matthew 21:9). Other chapters and verses in the Psalms are also seen as prophetic of Christ's ministry or the work of the church.

But what about some of the other books of the Writings? These include Ruth, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Lamentations, Daniel and the two books of Chronicles. The book of Daniel is certainly prophetic, but the others are considered as historic books or poetry and wisdom literature. Do they have any prophetic significance?

Specifically, how about the Song of Songs, also called the Song of Solomon or Canticles? This book has had many different interpretations, but few, if any, have been prophetic. Many see it as an allegory or an opera-like drama. The current trend regards the Song of Songs as simply a collection of love songs upon which religious people put spiritual meanings.

Is this all it is? Would God name a book that was merely love poetry "Song of Songs"? A literal translation would be "The Best of Songs" or "The Most Sublime of Songs." So here is a book, it appears, that is more than meets the eye.

Is there a prophetic level? Yes, but it is not obvious, nor would the "Christians" of this world generally accept it as such. Without the proper understanding of true church history and end-time prophecy, we would not accept it either.

The Characters

Though the scenes of the book take place in an atmosphere of romantic and even sexual encounters, this is only the first and most obvious level of understanding. On other levels, Jewish rabbis allegorize God and Israel from its poetry, and Christians see Christ and His Bride, the church. As an instruction manual

regarding the intimacy of the relationship between God and the Christian, the Song of Songs is without peer.

Any understanding of the Song of Songs, however, must begin with the book's characters. A young woman, a shepherdess, called the Shulamite in some Bible versions, has fallen in love with a man, whom she calls "my beloved." Some think this man is Solomon, a king; others say he is a shepherd. Some go so far as to say there are two men vying for the Shulamite's affections. In addition, the daughters of Jerusalem act as a chorus, commenting on and reacting to the words of the Shulamite. Her brothers may also have a few lines (Song 2:15; 8:8-9).

In Christian circles, the Shulamite and the Beloved are easily identified as types of the church and Christ. The daughters of Jerusalem and the Shulamite's brothers are harder to pinpoint as specific groups of people, but we can deduce a general identification from Song of Songs 2:2-3:

[The Beloved]
Like a lily among thorns,
So is my love among the
daughters.

[The Shulamite]
Like an apple tree among the
trees of the woods,
So is my beloved among the
sons.

In contrast to the Shulamite, the "daughters" are compared to "thorns." The Beloved is similarly contrasted with the "sons" (see Song 1:6), who are like "the trees of the woods." Thorns are obviously negative symbols (see Matthew 13:7, 22), but "the trees of the woods" does not seem to be. A better translation would be "the wild wood," and thus, it becomes another negative type.

Thus, the daughters and the sons are opposites to the main characters. If the Shulamite is a type of the true church, the daughters are false "Christian" churches that Christ will not even consider as suitable brides (see Song 6:8-9; Ezekiel 16:44-46; Revelation 17:5). Some think they are simply the unconverted.

If the Beloved is a type of Christ, the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-16), the sons are false shepherds or hirelings, who abuse the church (see Song 1:6; Ezekiel 34;

Acts 20:28-31). Some believe they stand for the leaders or governments of men. Remember, though, these are *general* interpretations, so we should check the context of each section to refine the meaning.

It is not necessary to assign a particular identity to every character, image or symbol in the book. Because of our unfamiliarity with the language and setting of the Song of Songs, this would be highly speculative and tedious. Generally, if we grasp the sense of a section, the symbolism falls into place on its own, or other scriptures explain it more plainly.

The Subject

We do not know for sure if the book is arranged chronologically or just in short, timeless vignettes. Some say that certain sections are dreams or flashbacks to previous scenes. However, a basic story can be seen in the flow of the text.

Song of Songs opens with the Shulamite in the blush of first love; it is so new to her that she must ask where her Beloved works (Song 1:7). The couple is separated, and each yearns to be reunited. The Beloved asks her to come away with him (Song 2:10), and the Shulamite seeks and finds him in the city (Song 3:2-4). Later, again separated, she looks for him again, only to be beaten by the city watchmen (Song 5:6-7). In the end, after praising each other's beauty and constancy, they are together again, and the Shulamite proclaims that "love is as strong as death" (Song 8:6).

However we arrange the various parts, the main story concerns the courtship of the Shulamite and the Beloved. In most of the book's verses, they vividly praise the other's excellence and express their deepest feelings. This human sexual imagery, rather than being erotic, simply pictures the depth of love and pleasure in a Christian's relationship with God. In a sense, the sexual union of man and wife is the closest human parallel to God's relationship with us.

Jesus Himself endorses this concept in John 17:3, "And this is eternal life, that they may *know* You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." This knowledge of God is intimate, similar to the relationship between a man and his wife (see Genesis 4:1; Luke 1:34). The apostle Paul calls the church's relationship with Christ, likened to a marriage partnership, "a great mystery" (Ephesians 5:32). Later, John is shown that the church is indeed the Bride of Christ (Revelation 19:7-9).

Parables

Therefore, the Song of Songs may best be considered as a parable, a form of teaching that Jesus employed so frequently in His ministry. A parable is a story drawn from everyday life that illustrates godly principles to those who are able to understand (Matthew 13:10-17). As we see from such parables as the Wheat and the Tares (Matthew 13:24-30) and the Great Supper (Luke 14:15-24) among others, they often have prophetic overtones. Sometimes they predict general attitudes and trends, but at other times they are more specific as to time, place and participants.

In the main, Song of Songs is general, describing the ups and downs that a Christian (and the church as a body) experiences over a lifelong relationship with God. A few sections, though, seem rather specific to the church's present condition as Christ's return draws ever closer.

Two such sections, known as the book's "dream sequences," bear a striking resemblance to one of Christ's well-known parables, the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). These three parables involve women sleeping while waiting for the Bridegroom. While the Parable of the Ten Virgins treats the women's subsequent actions together, the Song of Songs divides them into separate parables.

The first dream sequence (Song 3:1-5) shows the Shulamite in bed, and even in her dreams she seeks the Beloved (verse 1). Her love for him is so consuming that she constantly looks for him everywhere. When she awakens in the dead of night, she goes out into the city to look for him (verse 2). She goes down every street, into every square, without finding him. She asks the policemen strolling their beats if they have seen him (verse 5), but when they give her no help, she continues her search and immediately finds him (verse 4). She is so overjoyed—and so fearful of losing him again—that she clutches him tightly and refuses to let him go until she brings him back to her mother's house where they will be married. Since her relationship with the Beloved is so wonderful, she advises the other young women to make certain they are truly ready for the experience before they commit to a relationship of their own (verse 5; see Luke 14:26-33).

The second dream sequence (Song 5:2-8) is more tragic. Again, the Shulamite sleeps, but she is still somewhat aware of her surroundings (verse 2). The Beloved knocks on the door and beckons her to let him in. She, however, complains that she has just bathed and undressed for bed (see Revelation 3:17), and she does not want to dirty herself again (verse 3). When she sees him trying to open the door himself, though it is locked from inside (verse 4), she relents

and gets out of bed (verse 5). When she finally unbolts and opens the door, the Beloved is gone (verse 6)! Due to her lethargy and unwillingness, he had turned away in disappointment to feed his flock (see Song 6:2).

Distraught, she belatedly rushes out to find him. She calls his name, but he does not hear or respond. Again, she encounters the policemen, but instead of helping her in her search, they beat her, wound her and take her veil (verse 7). Forlorn, the Shulamite pleads with the other young women to tell her Beloved, if they find him first, to return to her and heal her lovesickness (verse 8).

The Fulfilment

What an incredible prophecy of the church of God today! Part of the church woke up from slumber with the strength and commitment to seek the Bridegroom high and low. These people were strong enough to overcome and pass by the problems they encountered out in the world. Before He had to knock on the door in judgment, these Christians have found Christ again and refuse to let Him go! They will not allow a separation to occur again!

Unfortunately, others have awakened more slowly, with much less strength and resolve. Though Christ knocks at the door, they have made excuses for refusing to invite Him in (see Revelation 3:20). Our Savior struggles to force the door, but it must be opened from inside. Disappointed, He must turn away and sustain those who have already responded.

Even in the last hour, however, a chance to repent still remains, but the return to God will be frightening and painful. This evil world will attack with bloodthirsty cruelty any weakness it sees. Rent, spent and defiled, these Christians who must endure the Tribulation—and possibly martyrdom—can rekindle their love for Christ. But, oh, at what a price!

Let this be a warning! The time for our Lord and Savior's return is close, and we cannot afford to ignore the knock at the door! We must cast off the comfortable, clean and secure bedclothes of our cosy lifestyles and gird ourselves to "seek the LORD while He may be found" (Isaiah 55:6)!

Quick analysis of Song of Solomon

1:1-3:5. Musings of the bride in the bridegroom's palace

1:1-17. She muses on her love for Solomon

2:1-3:5. The bride's musings on the blossoming romance

3:6-5:1. The bride accepts the bridegroom's invitation

3:6-11. Solomon brings his bride to Jerusalem

4:1-15. The bridegroom praises the bride

4:16-5:1. Anticipation of the joys of married love

5:2-6:3. The bride dreams of separation from the bridegroom but finds him

5: 2-8. The bride's second dream

5:9-6:3. In praising him to others, she claims him as her own

6:4-8:14. The bride and bridegroom express their ardent love for one another

6:4-10. He praises her loveliness

6:11-13. Her experience in the nut orchard

7:1-8:14. Mutual praise and devotion

The Rapture in the Song of Songs

Christ said, "I have foretold you all things" (Mark 13:23)

The Secret of the Stairs

One of my favorite scriptures is Song of Solomon 2:10-14. It paints a beautiful picture of the Rapture of the Church when flowers are unfurling their blooms like tiny upside-down umbrellas and birds are singing for the sheer joy of being alive in the spring.

The Lord teaches by types and likenesses. Solomon was a son of David, a good type of Christ, the Son of David. In this scripture, Christ is the beloved Son who comes "leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills." He addresses his loving bride, the Bride of Christ, those of the Church that have a love relationship with him and are to be taken to Heaven when the Rapture takes place. As this passage begins, we hear her saying,

The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills...My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle (literally, turtledove) is heard in our land; The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret *places* of the stairs.

The word "*places*" is not in the original. This is why it is in italics in the King James Version. The word was supplied by the translators, who did not understand the full significance of the passage. This scripture is talking about the secret of the stairs.

"Rise Up" - "Come Up Hither"

"Rise up," it says, similar to the "Come up hither" of Revelation 4:1. Both are referring to the Rapture, when we will meet Christ in the air. These stairs remind us of Jacob's ladder. He "dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to Heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold the LORD stood above it" (Genesis 28:12).

In the Song of Solomon, if you have an ear to hear, you will be able to hear the overtones if you listen carefully. The Lord is the bridegroom. "Rise up," he says, "my love, my fair one, (his Bride is his love) and come away (it is the Rapture).

For, lo, the winter is past (it is spring), the rain is over and gone;" (the latter rain of Nisan, our March 28 through April 26, is over).

Former and Latter Rain

The former and latter rains are such definite seasons in Israel that they are listed on their calendars that list the feasts and times of harvest. The former rain starts Tishri 1, in the fall, the latter rain on Nisan 1 in the spring. This is of tremendous import for according to Hosea 5:3, the Lord "shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth," but more about that later.

April Showers Bring May Flowers

At the time of the Rapture, "The flowers appear on the Earth (i.e., April showers bring May flowers, so it is May, and May 31, 1998 is the only time Pentecost falls on Sunday before the 40 years of probation end); the time of the singing of birds is come (it is spring, when we will sing 'a new song' as we fly like birds up to heaven), and the voice of the turtle (*tor*, turtledove, a migratory bird that returns suddenly in the spring and is a symbol of the Spirit of God) is heard in our land; The fig tree (Israel) putteth forth her green figs (the fruit of Israel is not quite ripe when the Rapture takes place), and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell (it is the time of the firstripe grapes, i.e., Siven on the Jewish calendar)

In the Clefts of the Rock

"Arise, my love, my fair one and come away (the Rapture). O my dove (one sealed with the Spirit of God until the day of Redemption), that art in the clefts of the rock (i.e., in Christ, for 'that Rock was Christ'), in the secret of the stairs." If we truly believe in Christ and trust him as our Saviour, we are "in Christ." We are in the clefts of the Rock. When he is ready to take the Body of Christ to Heaven, all those joined firmly to him will go.

The Open Door

Do you agree that the Rapture is actually the secret of the stairs. Like Jacob's ladder, the top of the stairs reaches to heaven, angels ascend and descend on it and the Lord stands above it. The Rapture is when we will go through a great door in heaven to stand before our Lord Jesus Christ. Revelation 4:1 says,

behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard *was* as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter. And immediately I was in the spirit: and behold, a throne was set in heaven, and *one* sat on the throne.

Date Clues

Just look at the exciting date clues our loving God has given us. It is not dreary winter, but beautiful spring, and after the latter rain, every sprig is coming to life with lush foliage. Spring is appropriate for the Rapture is also a time of resurrection. The green figs enable us to place the Rapture between the end of the latter rain (April 26) and when the early figs ripen, in some years the end of May, in others early June. Pentecost is Sivan 6 (May 31 in 1998) after the rains are over and there are birds, green figs and May flowers.

The Lord's timing is perfect. A beautiful spring day makes us want to fly when we hear the voice of the turtledove, ie., the Lord, for the Lord himself shall descend with a shout.

Time of the First-ripe Grapes

As you study Scripture, you will find other parallels. For instance, after leaving Egypt on the Passover in the first month, when Moses sent them to spy out the promised land, it was the "time of the firstripe grapes. So they went up" (shadow of the Rapture), "and searched the land." The Septuagint says it was "the days of spring, the forerunners of the grape." In Israel, grapes begin to ripen in Sivan, so it looks like we will go up to search our promised land in the Jewish month of Sivan.

Two Raptures

Some Christians expect the Rapture before the Tribulation. Others expect it at the end of the Tribulation just before the Wrath of God is poured out. The reason, as I see it after over 48 years of intense Bible study, is because there actually will be two Raptures. The first one is the Rapture of the Bride of Christ saints (the wise virgins), the second of the Tribulation saints (including the foolish virgins that got left behind the first time.

Can There Be a Partial Rapture?

There are also two views concerning the Pre-Trib Rapture. Some think that every Christian will go in the Rapture. It is the Body of Christ, and they say not a finger will be left behind. Others think that it will be a partial Rapture and that it is possible for a believer to be left behind.

I believe that the Philadelphian group of Revelation 3:7-13 will go in the FIRST TRUMP Rapture, and that the Laodicean group of Rev. 3:14-22 will be left behind at that time. However, they will be taken up with the Tribulation saints in the LAST TRUMP RAPTURE at the end of the shortened Tribulation.

Those who think a partial Rapture is impossible cite Romans 8:1. It says, "THERE is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." The Greek word translated "condemnation" is "katakrima," damnatory sentence, from "katakrimo," to judge against, sentence, condemn, damn. However, damnation is different from disciplinary chastening.

Hebrews 12:6 says, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." This is similar to Jesus' message to the Laodiceans. In Revelation 3:19, he said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent." In both cases, the word translated "chasten" is "paideuo," discipline, to teach by punishment.

In Jesus' message to the Laodiceans, he is addressing the "church" (Rev. 3:14,22). These people are believers. They have to be in Christ before they can be spewed out of his mouth. Verses 15 and 16 say, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

These are behind a closed door, but they are still promised the chance to sit with Jesus in his throne. He tells them, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne" (Rev. 3:20, 21).

Therefore, it looks like the lukewarm church will be left behind in the first Rapture and then be taken to Heaven with the Tribulation saints at the second Rapture.

The Open Door

The situation is different for the Philadelphian church. Addressing them, Jesus said, "I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door" (Rev. 3:8). This open door is a symbol of the Rapture. As the fourth chapter of Revelation begins, "behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard...as a trumpet...said, Come up hither."

Two Doors

Indicating more than one Rapture in the parable of the fig tree, Jesus said "So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things (Israel grafted into her old rootstock and growing), know that it is near, even at the doors." Since "doors" is plural, two Raptures fit right in.

Days of Noah Versus Days of Lot

There are at least two days of the Son of man. In Luke 17:22, Jesus mentioned "one of the days of the Son of man" to his disciples. Two differences stand out when you examine the days of Noah and Lot in Matthew 24:37-42 and Luke 17:26-37. Marriage is mentioned in the days of Noah but not in the days of Lot. No fire falls in the days of Noah, but it falls that same day in the days of Lot. These types represent two different Raptures, one Pre-Trib and the other Pre-Wrath. Also, since marriage is mentioned in the days of Noah, it seems that the Bride of Christ will be taken to Heaven first, then the rest of the Body of Christ will be caught up just before the Wrath of God is poured out at the end of the shortened Tribulation.

Since the first Rapture is as the days of Noah, we should easily make the connection that the first Rapture is only for the Bride of Christ. Everyone that went into the Ark was married. Even the animals went in two by two.

First Trump Versus Last Trump

The Jews recognize that there are two trumps. They call the trumpet blast at Sinai (Ex. 19:16) the "Left Horn" or "the First Trump" of God's redemption. This refers to the two horns of the ram caught in the thicket that Abraham sacrificed on Mt. Moriah after Isaac was bound. They connect the "Right Horn," or "Last Trump," to the Feast of Trumpets.

Two separate gatherings. Some who teach that there is only one Rapture do not stop to think that if there is a "last trump," there has to be a first trump. Neither do they see that at the first trumpet call, THE LORD HIMSELF GATHERS THE SAINTS; and at the last trumpet call, HE SENDS HIS ANGELS TO GATHER THE SAINTS. Therefore, they must be two separate gatherings. We have to rightly divide the word of truth (II Tim. 2:15).

The reason Christ does not come to gather the Tribulation saints

The General Festal Assembly is taking place on the Feast of Trumpets in Heaven. It is Coronation Day, the day of the Marriage of the Lamb and the Judgment Seat of Christ. It is also the day of the Last Trump Rapture.

In Nu. 10:2, Israel was to "Make thee TWO TRUMPETS of silver...that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps. And when they shall blow with them, ALL the assembly shall assemble themselves to thee at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And if they blow but with ONE trumpet, then the princes, which are heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather themselves unto thee."

The first trumpet is the first Rapture, when ""THE LORD HIMSELF shall descend from heaven with a shout" (I Thess. 4:16). This takes place in Rev. 4:1, after which the 24 elders are seen in Heaven. Twelve of those are the 12 apostles. The other 12 are "the princes, which are heads of the thousands of Israel." This is when they "shall gather themselves unto thee."

When the "last trump" of I Cor. 15:51,2 sounds, "ALL shall be changed." At this second Rapture, Christ will be in Heaven. That Feast of Trumpets is Coronation Day, when Christ gets his golden crown, also the day the Marriage of the Lamb and the Judgment Seat of Christ. Therefore he sends "HIS ANGELS, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth (Rapture II) to the uttermost part of heaven" (those who were taken to Heaven in Rapture I) (Mark 13:27). They are gathered before the judge to receive their rewards.

The two scriptures, I Thess. 4:16-18 and I Cor. 15:51,52, refer to the two Raptures. The first trump, similar to the first trumpet that sounded on Pentecost at Sinai, is mentioned in I Thess 4:16-18 and Revelation 4:1. I Thess 4:16-18 says, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. Rev. 4:1 says, "and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither."

The last trump is mentioned in I Corinthians 15:51-53. It says "behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, AT THE LAST TRUMP: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

Different Ranks

According to I Corinthians 15:22,23, those "in Christ shall all be made alive, But every man in his own order (tagmati, rank)." We realize that there are Church saints and Tribulation saints, each made alive in his own rank.

By the end of the shortened Tribulation, ALL Christians will appear in Heaven. Two groups will be gathered there. The Church saints who were taken to Heaven in the first Rapture will be gathered from Heaven. Those who are going in the second Rapture will be gathered from Earth. Mark 13:24-27 shows that this gathering is just before the Wrath of God is poured out. It says, "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall

not give her light, And the stars of heaven shall fall, and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven."

The Two Raptures in the Book of Revelation

Both Raptures are depicted in the last book of the Bible. The first is seen in the "Come up hither" of Rev. 4:1. The heavenly scene right after the Rapture is described in Rev. 5. The great multitude who are part of the second Rapture are described in Rev. 7:14,15: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God."

These cannot just include the 144,000 Jews, for this is "a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations" (Rev. 7:9). Obviously, the 144,000 can be numbered.

Sandwiched between these two references to Raptures in the Bible is Revelation 6, which depicts the Tribulation. This chapter starts with the Beast riding forth on a white horse at the beginning of the Tribulation and ends with "the great day of his (the Lamb's) wrath is come." The Day of God's Wrath is at the end of the shortened Tribulation. The sixth seal is broken, then Rapture II takes place just before the seventh seal releases the seven trumpet judgments.

The Righteous Are Taken Away From the Evil to Come Both the Old Testament and the New Testament agree that the righteous are taken away before the evil to come, i.e., the Tribulation. Isaiah 57:1,2 says, "merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness."

In the New Testament, Revelation 3:10 shows that the Philadelphian church group will be kept from the time of trial we call the Tribulation. It says, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation (peirasmou, trial), which shall come upon all the world, to try (peirasai) them that dwell upon the earth."

"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36).

The Prize

To be chosen as part of the Bride of Christ and be taken to Heaven before the Tribulation is the prize we are running the race to win. The Philadelphians win the prize and the Laodiceans must be the castaways.

In I Corinthians 9:24-27, Paul said, "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

Paul could not lose his salvation. The only way he could end up being a castaway would be to be part of the group called the friends of the Bridegroom, who are invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, instead of being part of group called the Bride of Christ, who are chosen to attend the Marriage of the Lamb. This is the difference between the groups participating in the two Rapture-Resurrections.

Paul also said, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). The high calling here is the first Rapture, the prize that can be worked for. Salvation is a free gift. Rewards can be worked for, and we should strive to win the prize of participating in the first Rapture.

Some hope for the first Rapture on April 15, the LAST DAY of Unleavened Bread, Nisan 21, 5769 and the second on the Feast of Trumpets in 2015 (Sept. 14, 5776). Watch and Pray.

Christ's Return as the Latter Rain

The Sun Knoweth His Going Down

According to Malachi 4:2, Jesus is "the Sun of righteousness" that will arise with healing in his wings, and "the sun knoweth his going down" (Psalm 104:19). He is "the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8), "The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). It is inconceivable that as God, he would not know his own time of coming. He made the plans before time began.

Isaiah 44:6 reveals who he really is:

Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts: I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.

The Lord Jesus Christ, our redeemer, is both the "first," Lord of the Old Testament, and the "last," Lord of the New Testament. In Revelation 22:13, Jesus said, I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

In II Corinthians 5:18, we are told plainly that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." Colossians 1:15-19 explains that Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist....For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.

In Isaiah 46:9,10, is said:

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.

He Will Come as the Rain

The Bible is sprinkled with time clues. As far back as Deuteronomy, 11:14, Israel was given a promise. The Lord said:

I will give you the rain of your land in **his due season** (i.e., Christ's due season), the first rain and the latter rain.

Christ has two due seasons, and his two comings are as the former and latter rain. Hosea 5:15-6:3 help us to understand this. As chapter five ends, Christ is talking, then as the next chapter begins, we hear Israel speak.

I (Christ) will go and return to my place (Heaven), till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction (the Tribulation) they will seek me early. COME (says Israel), and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days (two 1,000-year days) will he revive us: in the third day (third millennium) he will raise up up, and we shall live in his sight (fulfilled to the letter in 1948). Then (after 1948) shall we know, if we follow on (i.e., past the Sign of the End of the Age in 1967) to know the LORD: his (the Lord's) going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.

The Former and Latter Rain

Joel adds another clue, giving the time that both of these rains begin to fall in Israel. Chapter 2:23 says,

God...he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.

In Scripture, when a month (lit., new moon) is given, the first day of that month is understood unless another day is given. Therefore this passage in Joel means the first day of the first month.

If you look up a Jewish calendar that lists the feasts and times of harvest, you will find that the Lord is keeping his promise concerning the former and latter rain in Israel. Those are such definite times that they are listed on their calendar. The former rain begins Tishri 1, and Jesus was born on Tishri 1. The latter rain begins on Nisan 1, and Christ will return on Nisan 1.

The Regnal Year

Ezekiel 29:17,21 cinches the date of Nisan 1. Verse 17 sets the date, "in the first month, in the first day of the month." Then verse 21 says,

In that day (Nisan 1) will I cause the horn (king) of the house of Israel to bud forth, and I will give thee the opening of the mouth (i.e., the logos) in the midst of them; and they shall know that I am the LORD.

Nisan 1 is not only the first day of the Jewish Sacred Year, but the first day of their Regnal Year. Our Lord Jesus Christ will return as King of kings and Lord of lords on the same month and day of the month that all their other kings officially took office.

We therefore cannot apply this book at wish. Origen said that the content of Ecclesiastes had a natural application, Proverbs a moral, and Solomon's Song a mystical; and Christians since have delighted in the thoughts here suggested of the church as the garden of the Lord, and as the bride seeking and finding Him whom her soul loveth, and delighting in His presence. 'The experimental knowledge of Christ's loveliness and the believer's love, is the best commentary on the whole of this allegorical and prophetic song.'

Questionnaire on Job

1. Trace the development of Job's thought, as given in his speeches, with special reference to his attitude to (a) God, (b) himself, (c) conventional theories about sin and suffering.
2. Contrast Psalm 37:2 with Psalm 42. What is referred to in each case and how can these statements be reconciled?
3. Paul (1 Cor. 3:19) quotes Job 5:11) uses the story of Job to illustrate the purpose and mercy of God. Study the book from these aspects.
4. Find quotations which show that suffering may be viewed as (a) retributive, (b) disciplinary, (c) a probation, and (d) leading to a deeper experience of God's mercy. In this connection look up any marginal references to the New Testament which may be given.

Questionnaire on the Psalms

1: Which famous Psalm of David contains the line, "he maketh me to lie down in green pastures"?

- ☒ Psalm 13
- ☐ Psalm 23
- ☐ Psalm 25
- ☐ Psalm 32

2: Which is the longest Psalm?

- ☐ Psalm 35
- ☐ Psalm 90
- ☐ Psalm 119
- ☐ Psalm 149

3: What is the first line of Psalm 1?

- ☐ Why standest thou afar off, O Lord?
- ☐ Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous
- ☐ Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands
- ☐ Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly

4: Which Psalm describes how well the Lord knows man, starting with the line, "O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me"?

- ☐ Psalm 119
- ☐ Psalm 129
- ☐ Psalm 139
- ☐ Psalm 149

5: What are Psalms 120-134 collectively known as?

- ☐ The Psalms of Asaph
- ☐ The Songs of Degrees
- ☐ The Songs of Solomon
- ☐ The Maschils

6: "Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts", is followed by which line?

- ☐ Praise ye him, sun and moon, praise him, all ye stars of light
- ☐ Let them praise the name of the Lord
- ☐ Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds
- ☐ Praise him with the sound of the trumpet

7: What is one common interpretation of the content of Psalm 72?

- ☐ A prophecy of the exile of the Jews to Babylon
- ☐ A prophecy of the Roman rule of Israel
- ☐ A prophecy of the future kingdom after the return of Christ
- ☐ A reflection on the Garden of Eden

8: Which Psalm does Paul quote from in his exhortation at Antioch?

- ☐ Psalm 2
- ☐ Psalm 5
- ☐ Psalm 10
- ☐ Psalm 22

9: How does Psalm 100 say we should come before the Lord's presence?

- ☐ With joy
- ☐ With prayer

- ☐ With thankfulness
- ☐ With singing

10: How many sections is the book of Psalms split into?

- ☐ 3
- ☐ 4
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6

11: Who wrote the the majority of the Psalms?

- ☐ Asaph
- ☐ Solomon
- ☐ David
- ☐ Moses

12: What does Psalm 16 say there is in the Lord's right hand?

- ☐ Pleasures for evermore
- ☐ Joy and eternal life
- ☐ Salvation and righteousness
- ☐ Gifts of light and life

13: How many types of musical instruments are mentioned in Psalm 150?

- ☐ 3
- ☐ 5
- ☐ 8
- ☐ 10

14: Psalm 91 verses 11 and 12 are quoted in which New Testament incident?

- ☐ The baptism of Jesus
- ☐ The temptation of Jesus
- ☐ The triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem
- ☐ The crucifixion of Jesus

15: Jesus was a high priest after the order of which ancient king, mentioned in Psalm 110?

- ☐ David
- ☐ Asa
- ☐ Jehoshaphat
- ☐ Melchizedek

16: The snail is mentioned in which Psalm?

- ☐ Psalm 40
- ☐ Psalm 58
- ☐ Psalm 74
- ☐ Psalm 134

17: Which of the following instruments are mentioned in Psalm 92?

- ☐ Harp and sackbut
- ☐ Psaltery and harp
- ☐ Flute and stringed instruments
- ☐ Organs and timbrel

18: Which is the shortest Psalm?

- ☐ Psalm 24
- ☐ Psalm 56
- ☐ Psalm 117
- ☐ Psalm 118

19: What is the "chorus" in Psalm 136 which is repeated in every verse?

- ☐ For his mercy endureth forever
- ☐ For the Lord is good in all the earth and heavens
- ☐ For his statutes are right and his judgements true
- ☐ For his righteousness is above all other

20: Which Psalm is entitled "A Prayer of Moses"?

- ☐ Psalm 66
- ☐ Psalm 90
- ☐ Psalm 99
- ☐ Psalm 145

Questionnaire on Ecclesiastes

1. Who is the author of Ecclesiastes? Give evidence to support your position.
1. What is your understanding of Ecclesiastes 7:15-18?
2. What view of God does the author of Ecclesiastes have?
3. What explanation for the meaning of human existence does the author of Ecclesiastes give?
4. Interpret Ecclesiastes 12:1-5.
5. Is it difficult to harmonize the ideas in Ecclesiastes with the rest of Scripture? Why or why not?

Questionnaire on the Song of Songs

1. Work out the application of the message interpreted as referring to the love of Jehovah for Israel, its condescension, constancy and completeness.
2. Having in mind Revelation 22:17, 20, note all the invitations to 'come', and apply to Christ and the church.
3. Find parallels in this book to Psalm 45 and Ephesians 5:23-32.

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